

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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[REGISTERED FOR TRANSMISSION ABROAD.]

No. 889.—VOL. XXXV.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING MAY 15, 1880.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[THE DANGERS OF THE STREETS.]

CECIL'S FORTUNE.

CHAPTER VII.

MOTHER SHIPTON'S PROPHECIES.

A wrinkled crone with wicked eyes,
And parched lips that muttered lies.

LADY KATE ORMOND was brave, as were all the women of her race, but she inherited a strong vein of what it is the custom to call superstition from some ancestor on the earl, her father's side.

We all know that the north country is famous for weird old legends and stories. In these beautiful Kate had delighted when a little child sitting at the feet of her old Highland nurse. She possessed a quick, bright, poetic fancy, and there is a vast element of poetry in all that touches on the supernatural. She was therefore quite penetrated with awe when she was told by her maid Pomfret that the hideous, hag who now looked into her eyes was that veritable Mother Shipton whose prophecies have been so much read and commented on of late years, but whom everybody supposed to have been dead, and like "Imperial Caesar," "turned to clay" some four centuries ago.

Had she really, then, discovered the elixir of life? If she had, she had not also discovered the cordial which Cagliostro used to tell the fine ladies of the court of Marie Antoinette conferred perpetual youth. No, for this old woman who stood in the strange blue light of the fire

and looked up into the lovely face of Lady Kate had one of the ugliest, most wrinkled, most wicked, most cunning, yet most clever faces that it is possible to imagine or describe.

Old! Yes, the face was quite a hundred years old, Lady Kate thought: toothless jaws, sunken cheeks wrinkled as old parchment, yet white as with the pallor of death; the mouth had fallen in; the smile upon it expressed the most bitter mockery, the most diabolical malignity that it is possible to conceive; the eyes were wonderful, black as night, bright as diamonds, flashing, mocking, filled with a wicked intelligence that seemed to flame into them as from the deepest depths of Tophet.

It was a face to make one shudder. The snow-white hair streamed on the shoulders of the hag below her hood. For the rest she wore rags. Her feet were bare; her arms and claw-like hands might almost have been those of a skeleton. She stared Lady Kate full in the face.

The graceful girl stood erect and returned the glance, not uncourtously, but with a certain courage and unconscious hauteur which did her harm, poor child, had she but known it, and made the "witch" hate her with a deadlier hatred than before.

"Don't you think I should make a picture for the Academy, Lady Kate Ormond?"

The witch made a kind of mocking obeisance to Kate as she spoke.

"Pardon me," Kate said, "I came here not to interfere with you, but because I thought you were clever, and could tell the dispositions of people if you saw their likenesses or their handwriting. Also, I was told that you were a fortune-teller and could predict my future."

"So I can. I look in your face and I read—ha, ha, ha!—great reverses, wonderful reverses. Ha, ha, ha! Oh, yes, I don't require to read the palm of your hand, nor do I consult the stars as some weak creatures do. No, no, I only have to look man, woman, or child in the face, and there I read their whole future history. Ah, I see such things in your face—such things. I am almost sure you will commit a murder!"

"Never!" said Lady Kate, emphatically. "I am one who love and pity all mankind. Yes, even the worst of them."

She paused. She felt inclined to say "even you," but she was wise and added nothing more. The woman broke into a laugh—a hideous laugh, mocking as one could imagine the laughter of demons.

"Love all mankind! Well, you are pretty, and mankind will make love to you as long as your beauty lasts. You will marry, and you will ride over the heads of the poor as you have done hitherto; you will trample them for a time under your feet as you have done hitherto. Yes, yes, yes—all of you aristocrats—it is the same, quite the same, with you all, not quite so bad now, though, as it was in the days when I was young, more than four hundred years ago. Then fine ladies, in the times of the Edwards and the Henries, used to order their waiting-maids' ears to be cut off and their tongues cut out if they displeased them, and they were carried out into the courtyard and mutilated if they had forgotten to prepare a hair wash or a face powder, or had laid aside a golden bracelet or golden necklet, and could not remember where amid all the drawers and boxes of the fine lady, for in those days, as in

these, servant-maids were sometimes idle, sometimes forgetful. But then their ladies had the same power over their lives and limbs that the Czar of all the Russias has now over the lives and limbs of his subjects. You aristocrats would like to have those good old times come back again. And as it is you triumph, and you insult and you expect all the servants and the tradespeople, and the governesses and the milliners and the dressmakers, to live only to do you service, and while the poor starve on a herring and a bad potato; while infants die of cold and men of overwork and exposure, and women for need of common comforts while they lie weak, with their new born babes by their sides, you, if you hear of these stories, just say, 'Dear me, what bad management.' Then, perhaps, you subscribe five shillings to a charity, and after that you order a diamond necklet which costs a thousand pounds, and the West End tradesmen get rich, but the poor writhe and suffer and starve all the same. How long do you fine folks expect this to last? It won't last three years more—no,

For the world to an end shall come
In eighteen hundred and eighty-one."

As the old creature spoke she commenced skipping and dancing round the large, shadowy, scantily furnished room with an agility that seemed positively supernatural. While she so skipped a tune began to sound from the ceiling—so it appeared, at least, to the amazed Lady Kate. It was like the music of an accordion, and the tune was one called "Oh, merrie row the bonnie bairn," a quaint, cheerful, yet weird old ditty. The old hag in her rags, with her bare feet, skipped hither and thither round the room in time to the melody.

Kate shuddered when she saw her making straight for her—shuddered and turned round in search of Pomfret. What was her horror to find that her maid had disappeared? Lady Kate was little more than a child in years. She knew next to nothing of the world, hence it never struck her that there was a plot, that her maid and this witch were confederates. She at once supposed that "poor Pomfret," as she called her, had fallen a victim in some way to this terrible old woman.

She burst into a passionate flood of tears. It was one of the charges of the countess against her fair child—that she had not proper "control over her feelings," which was, she assured her, "very bad form."

"Pomfret, Pomfret, poor dear Pomfret, and I was cross to her just now. Oh, what have you done to poor dear Pomfret? Where is she? Have you hurt her? Oh, have some pity!"

Mother Shipton answered by a most unearthly and horrible laugh.

"I don't know anything at all about your maid. How should I? I suppose she is like all the maids of fine ladies have been for the last five centuries—up for a game when she can get a chance, and when the mistress has her back turned. You should have watched your maid, my fine young madam, if you expected her to keep close to you. But now it strikes me she has found her way into the street, and most likely she is walking along in the rain under the glare of your modern gas lamps linked arm in arm with her sweetheart. Ay, I can remember the time when all London was lighted only by oil lamps placed here and there in the walls, and when boys used to carry lanterns to light foot passengers along, and you paid them twopence for a four mile round. Ah, those were merry old days, the days when I was young. Why a rich trader could break the bones of his poor serving lads if he chose in those times, and nobody could say him nay, and the poor slept on hard boards, with a wisp of straw for a pillow, and one old rug to cover them on a winter's night; but the rich slept on beds of down even then; and the lives of the herd—they called us the herd—were of no more value than the lives of so many dogs. You and yours would like to bring in those laws again, but you can't—hurrah!—you can't. No, you can't, you can't!"

The horrible-looking old creature then commenced another series of skips and pirouettes round the room, executed with the agility of a young girl. Then once more she ran up to Lady Kate and looked her straight in the eyes.

"Now I will tell you your fortune that you came to hear. Well, you will marry and live in the style of a queen, then you will beg barefoot in London streets, for all your ancient lineage and your family jewels. Ha, ha, ha! And if you want to know anything else I won't tell you, for your end is too sad to dwell on. A run in the dark night, with the stars shining over your head, and the lamps blinking in front of you all through the crooked ways and turns and lanes that lead down, down, down to the river; and then a wild shriek, when you think of all you have lost, and a plunge into the water, and then death and darkness—death and darkness. Now I have told you your fortune and you may go."

"But I have not the half-sovereign to pay you with—I gave it to Pomfret," faltered Lady Kate.

"Oh, that is all right, for Pomfret gave it to me," the witch answered; "so you had better be off and make the best of your way home, for I keep a live, large Bengal tiger here and sometimes, if I let him out, he eats up folks, and he has a particular fancy for young aristocrats—he ate a prince last year in Germany."

Absurd as this may seem to the readers of "Cecil's Fortune," absurd as Lady Kate herself afterwards thought, it seemed most horrible to her at the time. She uttered a cry.

"Let me out, please—if you please. I am sure I never did you harm, and why will you persist in being angry with me? Let me out, I implore."

In a moment Lady Kate became sensible of a great current of air which came like a cold shower bath upon her head. She turned and perceived that the door of the room stood wide open, and beyond that there stood open likewise the door of the house, for she saw the lamps twinkling in the street, the dingy houses opposite, and the rain plashing into the gutter.

In a moment she was out of the room and in the long passage, and anon she stood on the wet pavement under the lamplight. The rain was falling fast and thick; she had no umbrella; the door closed behind her with a loud noise.

Lady Kate Ormond had never been alone in London streets before in her life; her maid had her purse; she could not have found her way from Greek Street, Soho, to Grosvenor Square without asking her way to save her life, and she would have been alarmed and horrified at the idea of addressing a stranger.

Yes, it was raining fast and she had not an umbrella. Pomfret had in reality deserted her in the most cruel fashion—unless, indeed, she had fallen a victim to that terrible old witch, Mother Shipton.

"And how am I to get in when I arrive at home?" Kate said to herself. "What will the servants think when I arrive. I know that Pomfret has a latch-key with which she would have opened the front door, for the bolts and chains are not fastened until later in the evening; but I have nothing; I cannot get in. What shall I do? If my mother found me alone in the streets, and if she knew that I had been out to have my fortune told, she would send me to a lunatic asylum, as remorselessly as she would send a kitten to be drowned. Yes, I know my mother—I know her pride. She would never forgive this; she would think that if I behaved in this way I should behave in some odd and bizarre fashion and bring disgrace on the family after I became the wife of the Marquis de St. Germaine, and perhaps—perhaps I should for—Oh, I know I never can love a man with his cold, cruel smile, and eyes full of vanity and selfishness. What shall I do—where am I going? If I could only meet a cab."

Beautiful Kate Ormond was utterly ignorant of the geography of the London streets. Anybody who reads this and happens to know Greek Street, Soho, will know that at one end lies the

dull, old-fashioned, but respectable square of Soho, and at the other end cluster a number of poor alleys and narrow streets and courts branching off into neighbourhoods dirty and unsavoury.

Unhappily for Lady Kate, intent on the search for a cab, she turned to the right instead of to the left on leaving the residence of the witch, and soon she found herself in a labyrinth of crooked lanes and narrow ways. She went on and on; the way grew narrower.

Anon she stood in a filthy and disreputable street—one of the worst in the worst part of the district about Soho: clothes hung across the road on lines even then at night and in the plashing rain. The miserable dwellers in the squalid houses with those broken window panes stuffed with rags were either out drinking or stealing, or having, perchance, no fires and many children in one room, were afraid to bring in the wet and ragged clothing, and so left them out all the April night in the rain.

The dim light of the lamps, few and far between, fell on miserable shops which displayed unwholesome-looking food, spongy cheese, stale herrings, sausages, and black puddings, the sight of which would make any save the starving shudder; fell on bloated, sullen faces gathered round the doors of a gin shop, whose glaring gaslights, and bright gilt letters making boasting announcements on a gay crimson ground, filled Lady Kate with curiosity, mingled with a sickening sense of fear.

"Oh, if any of those people would tell me where I might find a cab."

Still Lady Kate dared not address any of those people, their faces were too villainous. But, alas, she was observed by them. Two terrible women, ragged, beisterous, broad-faced creatures—rushed across the street, and each laid hold of her arms.

"What are you looking for, young woman?" asked one. "Ah, what a fine fur cloak you have, that cost more than five bob, I'll be bound. Now then, my dear, will you stand treat? Because if you don't it will be the worse for you."

"I have no money," said Lady Kate; "I have lost my way and my maid. If you will help me to find a cab I will give you some money, if you will tell me where to send it to, or—"

"Ha, ha! my dear, that don't do for us, not that. If you hain't got no money you've got on a beautiful cloak of splendid warm fur, that will serve us as well as anything else." As the woman spoke she violently tugged at the rich fur cloak which was fastened with two velvet buttons, these gave way, another moment and the costly covering was torn from the shoulders of the slender, graceful young aristocrat.

Lady Kate stood under the lamp-post with the pitiless rain beating upon her silk attire and white lace and gleaming golden ornaments—the at-home dinner dress of a nobleman's daughter of these latter days of this most wonderful nineteenth century.

Lady Kate looked in amazement and horror after the two women; there was a narrow street which turned off sharply near the corner where she stood, the women ran swiftly up this street. There were several idle lookers-on at this cruel, cowardly robbery; some shopkeepers came to their doors and stared at the shivering young lady, and at the two thieves as at a fine piece of acting.

Apparently there was nothing at all remarkable in the occurrence, except that the article stolen was of value and that the person robbed belonged (to outward seeming) to the upper classes; nobody attempted to follow the thieves, who were making the best of their way to the nearest receiving shop.

"What shall I do?" said Lady Kate, appealing in despair to a man who stood at the door of a miserable shop—apparently devoted to the sale and purchase of old iron. "Let me stand for a few moments out of the rain, and tell me where I can find a cab."

The master of the shop was a short, thick-set person of middle age, with a white, puffy face, and a dirty, dark beard; a man with "love of money" written on his brow in legible characters

—a man who would sell his best-loved friend for a five-pound note.

This man looked at Lady Kate and wondered if her locket and bracelet were eighteen carat gold or imitation; then he moved aside so as to permit her to enter his den of a shop.

"Did you know those people who robbed you before?" he asked, with a dogged stupidity, of Lady Kate. "Were they friends of yours?"

"Friends!" echoed Lady Kate, in a tone of supreme disgust and surprise.

A second look at the man's face showed her his intense stupidity. She broke into an involuntary laugh, and said:

"I see you do not understand. I have lost my way, and now I want a cab. I—"

"Well, if you will pay me, miss, I will fetch you one," said the master of the shop, with a cunning yet stupid smile.

"I have not my purse," began Lady Kate.

At that moment a door at the further end of the shop was opened with some noise, and a young man strode impatiently through the shop.

"I cannot wait any longer," he began. "Unless you return me that diamond buckle forthwith I shall have a search warrant and ransack your premises from end to end. That might not be so very convenient, sir, as you suppose."

The young man spoke with some fire and impetuosity. Lady Kate started when she heard the voice, and looking up, found herself gazing into the dark, astonished face of Cecil Renfrew.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LOVER'S WALK.

She was his life,
The ocean to the river
Of his thoughts.

BYRON.

CECIL started back in the wildest amazement. Surely this was a dream—a delusion of the senses? Surely in a moment or so that lovely face and exquisite form of Lady Kate would vanish into thin air?

He had thought incessantly of Kate from the very first moment he had seen her. Only the night before his soul had burned with fierce, intense longing once more to touch her hand and hear her voice, and he had seen her that morning in Marshall and Snellgrove's with her countess mother; but then she had been too proud or too modest to lift her eyes to his face. And now, strangest of strange things, here she was again in the poorest of shops in the Seven Dials, and she was alone, and it was night.

"I am dreaming a mad dream," he said, in a low tone, as he bowed low to the peerless Kate Ormond, "or else I am mad."

"You are not mad, sir," Lady Kate answered courteously, and with a bright smile. "I am Kate Ormond, and I will tell you another time what strange caprice of misfortune has brought me here. Meanwhile, I am in great distress; I wish to reach home. I came out with my maid, and I have lost her—lost my way, wandered here, and been robbed of my fur cloak by two women in the street. Now, I want to get home, and I do not know where to find a cab, and my maid has my purse. I don't know how to pay for one until I reach home."

She paused in such confusion and distress as enchanted and tortured her adoring lover. At the same time he was enchanted at her gentleness, and delighted to be able to help her; but at the same moment he was hurt beyond measure at witnessing her sufferings, her terror, the cold she was enduring, and a certain mysterious something which his true instinct told him was a secret she wished to hide from the watchful eyes of her mother the countess. Yes, Cecil guessed at once that this expedition with her maid had been a secret one, and he wondered what it was.

"I will go and find a cab at once," he began.

"Oh, but don't leave me here, I entreat you," Lady Kate cried, impetuously.

She glanced round on the stores of old iron and other rubbish, and then gave one swift, searching, half timid look at the ill-favoured master of the establishment.

"Let me come with you."

In a moment Cecil had taken off the long, thick woollen overcoat which he wore.

"If you will condescend to wear this," he said, "it will keep you from the wet, and we shall soon reach a cabstand."

"How good you are," said Kate; "but you will be wet, sir."

"I am a strong fellow," he answered, with a bright smile, "who does not easily take cold. And if I did I don't suppose that it would matter much to anybody."

"But it would matter to yourself," said Kate, with, what the lover thought, a divine smile, "and to those who care for you. Even I, a perfect stranger, would grieve much if you suffered through me."

"And to me it is ecstasy to serve you, to suffer for you."

He spoke with a passionate earnestness that carried conviction. Lady Kate, looking into the depths of Cecil's dark eyes, read there the secret of her power. It was not a guess or a surmise, but a complete revelation. She knew that she had won the entire love of this stranger who had struck her girlish fancy.

From the first she knew that as long as he lived and she lived there would be only one woman in the universe for him, and a pang shot through her kind, warm heart.

"Because we must be separated," she said to herself, clinging to the traditions of her class in her inward thoughts, and yet looking with her blue eyes filled with admiration on the stranger.

In that brief moment soul answered to soul, and heart to heart, and Cecil read that in the eyes of the maiden he was noble and heroic, and Kate read that in the eyes of "the stranger" she was divine, and not another word passed between them. Then the earl's daughter suffered Cecil to envelope her in his greatcoat, and she took his arm and passed in silence with him out into the street where the rain was falling, where the brutal drunken crowd were still hustling one another and screaming at the pitch of their lungs; but she had not an atom of fear, only she felt as if she could have walked on so with him for hours without feeling fatigue or impatience.

"He has the face of a hero," she said to her beating heart. "What a sweet, firm, gentle mouth; what a classic sweep of level brow, and then the nostril so finely curved, and the colouring just that rich, warm, dusky, brown that is the perfection of tone for a man's complexion. Achilles and the heroes of Troy must have had just such flashing eyes. I wonder who he is." And Lady Kate said, suddenly: "Tell me your name?"

"Cecil Renfrew. Sir Roderick Renfrew is my grandfather, but my father is the younger son. My uncle and two cousins stand between him and the title and Renfrew Manor. If I were a baronet's heir, Lady Kate Ormond, I should still be immeasurably beneath you. As it is, the social gulph that separates us yawns black and deep as some chasm of Tophet. Why do you not chide me for my presumption in daring even to allude to it, for yes, that gulph is measureless. No bridge can ever span it—no bridge built by mortal hands."

Lady Kate's heart beat so fast as she walked on in the rain still clinging to the arm of Cecil Renfrew that she could not find a voice to speak to him. She strove hard to speak those cold, sensible and cutting words which the dignified daughter of an earl should have spoken under the like circumstances.

Had not Cecil read something the girl's penetrating grey-blue eyes—something which filled him with a sad, wild feeling, half triumph, half despair, he had not dared to have spoken as he did speak to sweet Lady Kate on that stormy spring night.

"It is better not to speak of these things," said Kate, at last. "You know so little of me, but you have been and are kind, and my father will befriend you, and I, through all the changes and chances of this transitory life, will

be your friend. I feel as if I had known you for years and years, but that is impossible; I never saw you until last night. Excepting in my dreams," she added to her own heart.

This strange young couple had now left the murky neighbourhood of the Seven Dials far behind them. They were still walking along arm linked in arm; they were approaching more aristocratic purlieus, where the pavements were wider and cleaner, where the lamps were brighter and more numerous, where the houses were more imposing.

The rain had ceased; a few stars shone out dreamily from cloudland. The lovers—were they lovers, then, so soon? Yes, unworried lovers, but lovers notwithstanding. The lovers, we say, had passed two cabstands, and neither of them had attempted to break the wild, weird charm of that night walk through London streets. Lady Kate Ormond was the first to speak.

"Mr. Renfrew?"

"Lady Kate!"

"What am I to say to my mother, the countess, about poor Pomfret? My mother will annihilate me if she guesses the truth. I went out with my maid to have my fortune told by an old witch who lives in Greek Street, Soho. She is the most terrible-looking person you can imagine, with a face almost like a skull, and gleaming black eyes full of fire and wickedness. Her long snowy hair hung down her shoulders, yet she wore a white hood on her head. She was clad in rags. Her feet and legs, like skeleton limbs, were bare, but she skipped and danced like a girl. This old hag said that she was Mother Shipton, the famous witch of five centuries ago. She said that she had discovered the elixir of life; that she had drank of it, and that now she should live for ever. She told me that I should marry and live like a queen, and then come down to rags and beggary!"

"Detestable old impostor!" cried Cecil, furiously. "Tell me where she is to be found, and I will set the police about her."

"Wait!" Lady Kate answered. "I must not have it known that I, Lady Kate Ormond, went to such a terrible old creature, unless indeed poor Pomfret does not return, then no matter what I suffer. The place must be searched for her. I must tell you that when I looked round I suddenly missed my maid, and the old woman turned me into the street in the rain threatening to set a Bengal tiger on me, which she said she had in a cage close at hand, if I did not hasten out."

"Then how had you offended this old monster?" asked Cecil.

"I—I had never seen her in my life before," said Cecil. "But there is spite and vengeance in all this," said Cecil. "If you have not offended the witch you have offended this maid of yours. She must be your enemy."

Lady Kate paused, and a light seemed to dawn upon her.

"But how cruel!" she burst forth, indignantly. "I that am so fond of Pomfret; I that am always good to her. I never speak sharply to her unless she provokes me, but now that I come to think of it I see that Pomfret is often most unkind, most bitter towards me. Then did she take me there to terrify me?"

"You will dismiss her, of course?" said Cecil, bluntly.

"How can I, because the countess must not know of this?"

"It would be much better to tell her," urged Cecil.

"You do not know my mother," Lady Kate answered. "She would never forgive me if she knew this—never! She is implacable; she would consider me unworthy to be her child or the wife of the French noble to whom I am as good as betrothed."

Cecil's heart sank like lead, but he was brave, and he covered the wound which the young girl's words gave him.

"That would be terrible for you," he said, with a hard laugh, and he added: "I was told, or I heard it whispered about in Marshall and Snellgrove's among the customers this morning.



[MIDDLER. GRUNT'S DISCOVERY.]

LOST THROUGH GOLD; OR, A BEAUTIFUL SINNER.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Frank Bertram's Wife," "Strong Temptation," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XLII.

A VOICE FROM THE GRAVE.

Leave her to Heaven.

SHAKESPEARE.

MARMADUKE HARDY looked at his companion with an air of half amusement; he had no sympathy whatever with the shade of superstition in George Arnold's nature. He stepped softly from the arbour, and stretching out one hand, took hold of the apparition's arm with a firm grip, while with the other he clutched at the venerable white locks, which, as he fully anticipated, came off in his hand, disclosing a fine crop of short black curls. Having gone thus far, and Mr. Ghost beginning to kick and struggle in a most unspiritual fashion, Duke called out:

"Arnold, come here quickly!"

George, rushing to the rescue, beheld the ci-devant ghost writhing in the barrister's grasp and transformed into a very earthly personage.

"Get my handkerchief out of my pocket," directed Duke.

When it was given him the barrister cleverly bound the hands of the supposed ghost, who was then pretty helpless.

"Now, my man," began Duke, leading him back to the arbour and placing himself on one side of him while George Arnold took the other, "what were you doing here?"

The man muttered something about "a joke."

"It's too cold for that," said Duke, coolly. "Mr. Arnold and I got very chilly waiting for you. No man in his sober senses would choose to walk about as you are on a night like this for a 'joke.' You came here to meet someone. Now who was it?"

Mr. Arnold admired Hardy's presence of mind and ready wit. He would have enjoyed pitching into the ghost himself, only he thought it a pity to disturb the cross-examination.

"Look here, my man," went on Duke, after a pause, "you can take your choice—make a clean breast of your business here, or else go to prison on the charge of being about the Manor for a felonious purpose."

"She wouldn't dare to have the law against me," triumphantly.

"Lady Aston most certainly would not appear as a witness against her accomplice, but Mr. Arnold here, the guardian of the young countess, will be quite ready to prosecute you."

"Who said I was the countess's accomplice?" asked the man, sullenly. "Great ladies don't have to do with poor folks like me."

"Yes, they do sometimes," returned Duke, with admirable calm. "We know a little of Lady Aston's transactions with you. You purchased for her a certain quantity of poison known as arsenic, for which she paid you handsomely."

"If she's been and told you of course the game's up," said the man with a blank look of despair. "I'd never have split on her, though she didn't pay me handsome at all."

"She was going to though, and you have been hanging about the Manor in this shameful disguise to meet her and receive your hush money. Blood money, really; for between you, you have almost lied away the life of an innocent girl."

"Scoundrel!" burst forth George, vehemently. "I'd like to break every bone in your body."

"Softly," interrupted Mr. Hardy, "I don't go so far as that. Now look here," turning to the pretended ghost, "you have nothing to gain by

making us your enemies. It only rests with yourself whether you leave us to-night with a nice little sum of money in your pocket, or whether we give you up to the police; please yourself."

"I dinna wan ta gae agin ye," began the man, waxing very Scotch in his excitement, then calming down. "It's all my leddy's fault, every bit."

"My money's as good as Lady Aston's," said Arnold, cheerfully. "Come, tell me how much she was going to give you."

"She promised me fifty pounds," eagerly.

"She did, as true as my name's Jock Graham."

"Well, you have got yourself into a pretty scrape, Mr. Jock, and I will confess that you sold yourself very cheap. Now listen to me: if I let you go free and give you sixty pounds into the bargain I suppose you'd have no objection to answer a few questions?"

"I'd swear black was white to get myself out of this."

"That's more than we want. I only want you to tell us clearly what you know about Lady Aston."

Jock Graham was too frightened not to agree. From his story it appeared that he worked at a large dyer's about ten miles from Aston, and his wages being small augmented them by acting as special carrier between Aston and Norton when he walked to the dyeing works every day, returning at night.

Lady Aston had often entrusted parcels to his care, and he had spoken to her several times, when one day, just before she, with the earl, went up to London the last time, she asked him to procure her some arsenic.

"I told her," protested Jock, "it was against the rules to bring anything away from the dye works, but she said she must have the arsenic. Her maid could make a lovely green dye with it and she wanted some feathers dipped that shade. I begged her to let me take the feathers to Norton, but no, my lady would have her own way, and last February—not the one that's gone,

but February in last year—I brought up the arsenic."

"February," muttered George; "she began her plot early enough."

Mr. Jock went on to tell that he afterwards saw the feathers and a lovely colour they were. My lady gave him two sovereigns, and he took her a good lot more arsenic, he couldn't say how much, enough to dye two dresses and a shawl, perhaps. He never thought anything about the matter till Lord Aston died and Dr. Brown said he had been poisoned.

"And then?" asked George, eagerly.

"Then I up and wrote to my lady and said if she wanted me to hold my tongue she must pay for it."

"And she agreed?"

"She took no manner of notice, and I came up here two or three times to scare her. The maid knew something about it, too, and till she went to furrin' parts I held my tongue; but as soon as my lady come back ag'in I made up my mind to see her. I shouldn't ha' come ag'in, for I had a bit note this morning to say she'd meet me here to-night and give me fifty pounds if I'd keep a still tongue."

"And you can swear to all this, my man?"

"Yes; and I'm rather glad you caught me, for I feel a heap easier. Playing ghost ain't comfortable; it's very cold like as that gentleman said, and your hand's not light, sir, besides, my lady was just making a fool of me; she never came."

Jock Graham went home to Trent Park with its master and Mr. Hardy. When he left them he took sixty pounds in his pocket, and had put his name to a carefully written statement of his dealings with Lady Aston. By this time it was late, past eleven, and Duke yielded to Mr. Arnold's hospitable persuasions to spend the night at the Park. The two men had much to talk over. George was very grave and quiet, his dearest hope was gained.

There was little doubt that morning would see Alice's fair fame cleared, even from suspicion; but a fearful stain must rest for ever on the grand old name of the Austons, and an awful fate was surely coming on one who, with all her faults, was yet his cousin.

"You don't seem so elated as I expected," remarked the barrister. "I fancied there were reasons apart from humanity which interested you strongly in Miss Tracy's fate."

"It is the dearest hope of my life to make her my wife, but Hardy, weak as you may think me; I am sorry for the countess."

"She deserves no sorrow!"

"Not now, but I knew her as a child, later on as a lovely girl. I thought once, not three years ago, that she was the one woman in the whole world for me."

"Then I can understand everything. The Aston mystery is clear as day. You became rich instead of poor, and Lady Aston repented her choice. She got rid of her husband to marry you?"

"Perhaps!"

"And she was jealous of Miss Tracy?"

"I never knew how she guessed my feelings in that quarter. I thought the secret was known only to Miss Tracy and myself."

"Well, you'll be married now, I suppose?" said Duke, cheerfully. "Mrs. Hardy will lose her companion. I wish though we had found them both."

George smiled.

"I think the best companion for Mrs. Hardy would be a husband; she is far too fair a specimen of womanhood to remain a widow."

No answer, unless a grunt expressing neither yes or no could be counted as such.

"I can never be grateful enough," continued George, "to Mrs. Hardy and yourself for all your goodness to Miss Tracy. But for your sister-in-law I believe my poor girl's troubles would have well nigh killed her."

"Mrs. Hardy is not my sister-in-law," corrected Duke, who was peculiarly sensitive on this subject, "she is my cousin's widow."

"Well, she is a sister any man might be proud of. Cousin-in-law is hardly any relation at all."

"Nevertheless I prefer it," Duke answered. "Will you go with me to the bailie to-morrow?"

"To-morrow will be a busy day."

"Yes, I dread one part of it, the explanation with the countess. I was at the Manor to-day, but I did not see her. I went to fetch Lord Aston's desk as you once suggested to me. There is nothing in it but old letters all in marvellous order."

"I should like to see it."

George fetched the desk, an old-fashioned one, beautifully polished, and bearing the coronet of the Austons. Mr. Arnold unlocked it and showed Marmaduke the exquisite order within.

"Do you mind my moving the letters? There, so."

And Duke displaced a small bundle and inserted his hand in the place thus cleared. He put his finger on an invisible spring, a partition flew back, disclosing a secret drawer.

"Have you looked here?" asked Duke, coolly.

George pushed open the drawer, it contained only one letter. Looking at it George saw the seal was unbroken, and that it was addressed to himself. Marmaduke Hardy, with rare delicacy, left the room.

He thought it fitting that George Arnold should be alone whilst reading that message from the tomb. He did not have to wait long before Mr. Arnold rejoined him with a pained, anxious face, and the open letter in his hand.

"Read that, please."

Duke took the sheet almost mechanically. He saw the date was in November, about three weeks before the earl's death.

"MY DEAR GEORGE,

"Last week I made a new will and left you and Alice Tracy sole guardians to my little girls. It will astonish you that my wife's name is not mentioned in the will, and save for her jointure she is left utterly unprovided for. George, my second marriage was a mistake. Although her face is beautiful, your cousin has the heart of a murderess. She has my title, enjoys my wealth, and she grudges me the few years I have to live. She married me for money; she would kill me now, that she may marry another for love. I am in my sound senses, and I tell you she is killing me, by repeated doses of poison, so small that their effect is almost unseen, she is hastening death. You will ask why, perceiving this, I walk willingly to my destruction? George, my heart is broken, I don't care to live. From the moment I discovered my wife's treachery my life was as hateful to me as to her. I was an idiot to think a young girl would love me, but I have paid dearly for my folly. I could not expose Sybil, she is too dear to me for that; but I have a fear, a vague misgiving that when I am gone my death may be laid at the door of an innocent person. You are my sole executor, George; spare my wife as much as in your power, but do not sacrifice anyone else for her. Be good to my poor children. Alice will help you there. I once thought you and she might come together. I am leaving you a fearful secret as a legacy. I may confide it to Alice. Farewell.

"ASTON."

Marmaduke returned the letter in perfect silence. George put it reverently away.

"Poor Lord Aston! I wonder which was the greater sin, to break such a noble heart or to shorten his life?"

"Do you think he did tell Alice?"

"Perhaps, Miss Tracy has always resisted the idea of suicide."

"Poor Alice, when I think of what she has suffered I feel furious against Sybil."

"If you could get the countess declared insane it would be a mercy."

"Not to her; it would be simply a living death. It might certainly give her time to repent."

"Women like her never repent," said Hardy, gravely. "Looking at Lady Aston's career from

first to last, I can see no redeeming trait. With the face of an angel, she seems to have the heart of a fiend."

The two men parted for the night. They passed it very differently. George in sound, peaceful slumber, dreaming perhaps, of the time when the lovely girl he had first seen gathering spring flowers in Trent Wood should come home to the Park as its mistress; but no such pleasant visions came to our barrister, for to Marmaduke Hardy a strange certainty had come that all was not well with Dorothea and her friend, that together or separate they were in trouble.

Directly after breakfast the horses came round. The gentlemen were in the saddle when a groom rode up in hot haste. Arnold started as he recognised the Aston liveries.

"What is wrong?" he cried, anxiously.

After recent events George felt prepared always for evil news from the Manor.

"Mrs. Brown wishes to see you at once, sir."

"What's wrong?"

"Her ladyship is very ill, sir."

"Not the countess?" meaning little Adela.

He was scrupulous to give her her title always in speaking of her to the servants. Her step-mother was the "Dowager Lady Aston."

"Yes, sir."

The man evidently knew nothing more. Sending him round to the servants' hall George Arnold put spurs to his horse, and rode off at full speed, followed by Marmaduke Hardy.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE LAST JOURNEY.

That unfenced country from whose bourns no traveller returns.
SHAKESPEARE.

Now, quite accidentally, the groom had deceived George Arnold. John had been with the rest of the servants when that gentleman announced, nearly three months ago, that henceforward he was master of the Manor, acting for his ward, Adela, Countess of Aston, that in his absence all orders were to be taken from Mademoiselle Gruet, and the Dowager Lady Aston would soon leave the Manor.

The groom had no notion of disobeying this announcement; but, in the excitement and confusion of the moment, he applied the familiar title to her who had borne it two years, and allowed Mr. Arnold to think his ward was in danger and not her stepmother.

George Arnold need not have been troubled how to break to his cousin that her cruel sin had found her out—Sybil was quite aware of it; she knew that detection and punishment stared her in the face; the clever plotting, the crafty scheming was all in vain.

Cold as it was the night before she had been true to her appointment. Why she had so long put off recompensing Jock seemed strange, in reality it was very simple: while Collins remained with her—nominally as her maid, really her mistress—Lady Aston was no free agent. Now, freed from this incubus, she went down the lime-tree walk, a well-filled purse in her pocket, to mete out to her assistant the price of his silence.

The game seemed just then in her own hands, the best of legal advice had only sufficed to save Miss Tracy from a violent death. In the eyes of the public at large she was believed guilty, a stain rested on her name, and she (Sybil) had taken good care she should not soon cross George Arnold's path.

Yes, all seemed to favour the dowager countess—the woman who had shared her guilty secret was miles away, a traveller upon the broad ocean, and the only other person in the world who knew the truth was too much alarmed for himself to come forward. Besides, according to his lights, Jock was an honest man; when once he had received the fifty pounds he would have scorned to betray Lady Aston's secret.

When the countess went down to the lime-

tree walk there seemed but one step between her and safety. The law had refused to free her from Alice, but she had stepped in and freed herself by the power of an iron will. She believed Alice Tracy as surely removed from troubling her as though she slept by the dead earl's side in the Aston vault.

George Arnold would never discover Alice Tracy; the English widow, who had loved her so well, would never find out the village where she was hidden. Surely George Arnold could not keep faithful for ever to the memory of her blue-eyed rival. Beauty such as hers must in time entrance his senses. Some day the man she so wildly loved would return to his old allegiance.

After all, had she not been his first love? Never had happiness seemed nearer to her, never since that hour when, in her mother's fragrant conservatory, she had voluntarily sent her lover from her because she wanted a coronet, had the future looked fairer to her? After all, she was young, a great many years stretched out before her. Looking across the long vista of the future, Lady Aston saw herself George Arnold's beloved wife, the dark error of her youth forgotten and ignored.

No words of mine can tell you how intensely she believed this, never a doubt troubled her that her fair dream would come true. She had bought Collins's silence, she was about to buy Jock Graham's; and, in spite of all the bitter things George Arnold had said to her, Lady Aston believed in time she could win him back.

She found she was too late—her confederate was in the enemy's camp. George Arnold's hand was planted on his collar, the stern English barrister had bound his hands. Sybil, Lady Aston, crept back to the house. All was lost; but one thing was left to her: to take a long journey.

She did not repent. As Duke said, women of her type rarely do; bitterly she lamented her failure, but she never deplored her sin; this woman believed firmly in one thing—fate. All that had gone wrong in her life she laid to the charge of destiny.

She went up to her own room, and, sitting at the unshuttered window, looked out at the starlit sky. Did she think of where she might be when the stars died out? Did her mind go back to the days when a little child she had been as innocent as the little girls downstairs whom she had made orphans? Did no fear, no dread come to her of the great unknown land whither she was travelling?

Perhaps; who can tell, in that awful hour, what thoughts visited her? But, whatever their nature, she hid them in her own breast. Sybil had lived alone, her thoughts, her hopes, her feelings had been utterly her own; she had kept them a secret as far as possible, locked in her own breast, and now she troubled no one to help her to prepare for her journey.

Oh, love! Oh, love! great master passion of our nature, how many crimes, how many sorrows, how many wrecked lives, how many aching hearts have been caused by you alone? But love did not cause the fate of Sybil: she lost herself for gold, she sacrificed herself for a title; this beautiful sinner cast love from her and trampled it under her feet. Later on she longed for it and could not get it, but that was not love's fault. Oh, no.

"Do not disturb me again to-night," was her last command to her maid, a simple village girl, as unlike Collins as she well could be.

"Don't you feel well, my lady?"
"Not very. You had better not call me in the morning, I think. Ask Mrs. Brown to look in as she goes down to the children's breakfast."

She spent the evening alone. How she spent it will never be quite clear until the great day when all secrets are told. Did she sorrow for the life she was leaving? Did she regret the kindly husband whose death she had hastened? We cannot tell.

She was obeyed to the letter. Clara never called her. No one troubled the still chamber; only when Mrs. Brown (or mademoiselle, as many of the household still sometimes called

her in mistake) was going downstairs with the little girls, Clara delivered her lady's message.

The kindly Frenchwoman felt troubled. She and Lady Aston had held little communication since the days when she was Mademoiselle Gruet. She had brought the children to the Manor at their guardian's request, and when the countess returned she had wished to go away at once to the quaint, old-fashioned house her husband had made her mistress of.

She had no angry words with the countess, but there had been no pretence of friendship between them. Sending the children on, mademoiselle—the name sounds most familiar to us—entered the pretty chamber that was called my lady's.

Something in its excessive stillness struck on her with a shudder. There was no sign of illness; the room was in the most methodical order. Apparently Lady Aston had not attempted to rise. The doctor's wife advanced on tip toe to the bed, and drew the curtain gently to see if Lady Aston were still asleep.

Sybil was lying in bed. Her dark eyes were closed; their long lashes drooping over her clear skin. Every feature of her perfect face was in repose and colourless as marble. Never, never more would they wake to the warmth and passion of this turmoil men call life!

Sybil, Countess of Aston, had started on a long journey. She had made a strange havoc of her happiness. The night before her last hope had been shipwrecked. She was not a creature to bear suffering patiently.

Mademoiselle knew quite well my lady had rushed from present trouble to others she knew not of. A slip of paper lay on the toilet table.

"Send for Mr. Arnold; he will understand."

Mademoiselle burnt the paper before she obeyed its behest by sending a groom to Trent Park to say the countess was very ill, and she, mademoiselle, wished to see Mr. Arnold. The groom gone, mademoiselle returned to the bedside. She saw then that one hand clasped a gold locket which hung from the neck on a piece of velvet. It was a shabby, poor little locket, and held the likeness of a young officer in his first regimentals.

It was George Arnold's last present to his cousin when he left her a child in the school-room to join his regiment; the portrait was his own. On a little table close by stood a candle which had burnt out. Mademoiselle understood all. Sybil had kept her treasure in her hand. She wished it to be the last thing her eyes should rest on.

Mademoiselle brushed away a tear. This one trait of tenderness; this one token of womanly feeling seemed to bring the unhappy Sybil nearer to her heart. Amid all her pride and hauteur, then, the countess had had room for one passion.

Mademoiselle gently cut the velvet and took the locket from her cold clasp, folding the hands on the breast. She could not let others see poor Sybil's secret. She kissed the poor cold brow and murmured as though the dead could hear the promise:

"At de last, my poor lady, I will bring it to you once again."

The servant came to the door to say Mr. Arnold and another gentleman were downstairs. Mademoiselle, wiping her eyes as she thought of the romance just ended, went slowly downstairs to meet the man who had been its hero.

(To be Concluded in our Next.)

THE CZAR OF RUSSIA.

ACCORDING to a correspondent the Czar is now to all intents and purposes a prisoner in his own palace. Ten officers of the guard are charged with the protection of the building, and their duty is to keep watch over the inhabitants and report their doings at certain times. Special regulations are issued for the surveillance of each floor of the palace. It is ordered that the

officers on guard at the floor where the Emperor and Empress reside shall turn back every one who is found there without special authority and does not belong to the Imperial family. Between twelve at night and eight in the morning not even the Czarevitch is admitted without a special pass, to be obtained of the Court Marshal, Von Grote. This regulation is so strictly carried out that Dr. Botkin, the Empress's body physician, had to wait one night for a pass before he was admitted to his patient, and the medicine he had sent for was also kept back until authority for its admission was obtained. The subterranean apartments have all been blocked up, it having been decided that they shall no longer be inhabited.

VIOLA HARCOURT;

OR,

PLAYING WITH HEARTS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Evander," "Tempting Fortune," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"SAMPSON AGONISTES."

ONE of the most charming poems written by Milton is that called "Sampson Agonistes," in which he portrays the giant, first of all beguiled by Delilah, who delivers him into the hands of the Philistines, and afterwards, with a masterly hand, depicts his sufferings in captivity, his deprivation of sight, and his death by breaking down the pillars of the temple, whither he had been brought that his captors may make merry over his fallen greatness, and the destruction of the revellers, who with the strong man are all involved in one common ruin.

Herbert Conyers was a strong man who had a fierce pride and delight in life. We have seen him a man among men, an athlete, a bold rider, an excellent doctor, and one who was superior, in many respects, to the ordinary run of mortals. When deprived of his vision, he was as much mortified and cast down as was Sampson, and Milton's glorious lines would apply to him as well as to the fallen giant.

It took him some time to realise the full depth of his misery; but when it gradually dawned upon him that there was no hope and that he was always to be blind, his heart nearly broke. He lived in hopes of meeting Viola again, yet by Fate's cruel decree he could never see her. Fortunately, her dearly loved features were engraved on his mind. He could see her in spirit, but he could not feast his eyes on her beauty, as he had done hitherto. It was a great shock to him, and his only consolation was the presence of Sandford Newton and his wife Lucy at the Hall.

They treated him with every kindness. Indeed Sandford's character continued to improve. As we have had occasion to observe, his good qualities were developed by adversity. Every day he would lead Herbert downstairs after helping him to dress, and Lucy would play and sing to him, while Sandford had gone out to see, if the police had yet received any tidings of the lost one.

Then she would gather flowers for him, and he would guess their names by their perfume. He had an easy-chair under a spreading cedar tree, and there he would sit listening to the birds, while he waited for the sound of the horse's hoofs that was bringing Sandford back again after his day's work was done. There would be a hearty shake of the hand, and Herbert would say:

"Any news?"
"None," Sandford would reply.

Herbert would then sigh deeply. Dinner would come in due course, and the evening would be spent in talking about Viola and dis-

cussing the chances of Viola's restoration. The summer sun was setting beautifully in a mass of fleecy clouds; the low hum of insects filled the air; the flowers breathed perfume ere they closed their petals for the night. A tiny fountain bubbled and sparkled from the mouth of a triton, and tinkled as it fell in a pellucid stream into the basin erected to receive it; a gentle zephyr blew from the west and Herbert Conyers sat in a chair brooding.

None of those pleasing things were for him. He could fancy them and that was all, yet it did not trouble him much, for he was thinking of Viola—his Viola; the darling one who was shrined in his heart of hearts like an idol.

"I have thought too much of her," he murmured. "She was my all in all. I worshipped her, and Heaven has punished me."

His head sank and his thoughts went back into the strangely chequered past. It was a relief to go back, for it took him away from the wretched present, to contemplate which was positive torture. Lucy came out and brought him a cooling drink; it was lemonade with ice in it. He drank it thankfully.

"I am very grateful," he said.

"Why are you so sad?" asked Lucy. "You never smile now."

"I have no cause to," Herbert answered. "I was thinking that this state of things cannot last. This is a world of change. Sandford has spent nearly all the money that Viola gave him. Neither he nor I have a penny. He must work, and I, who can now do nothing, must do something."

"You can always live with us, Mr. Conyers," said Lucy, kindly.

"And be a burden on you. No, thank you. That is not my disposition. It would not be right. Of course, it is very kind of you to say it, and only what I expected from you."

"But Viola. Think of her. Have you given up all hope?"

"Yes. It is to Lord Tarlington's interest to get rid of her. She is gone. I have wept for her and mourned her as one dead. We shall never meet again in this world!"

"Do not say that."

"I cannot help it," said Herbert, adding after a pause: "Tell me, Mrs. Newton, if there are not places where they take in poor blind people?"

"I should think so. Numbers of them."

"A charity, I mean. Will you ask Sandford if he will exert himself to get me into some home where I can learn a trade. The blind are taught to work, I believe, and I will work very hard indeed if they will teach me, so that I may pay the expenses of my board."

"Please don't talk like that," replied Lucy; "it makes me feel so miserable. I—I must go into the house and have a good cry."

She really was deeply affected. The quiet, submissive, humble, heartbroken way in which Herbert spoke, and his forlorn state, touched the girl to the heart. She put her pocket-handkerchief to her eyes and walked quickly over the velvet lawn to the house.

Since he had become blind, Herbert's sense of hearing was very acute. It was the balance of nature—the compensating law which makes up in one respect for that which a person is deficient in another. He listened attentively, and then rose up, his face convulsed with agony.

"Oh, Heaven, give me back my sight!" he cried. "What have I done that I should undergo this misery?"

Then, overcome by a sense of his feebleness, he sank back again into the rustic chair and buried his face in his hands. Suddenly he heard a footstep. At first he thought it was Lucy coming back, but a moment's attention convinced him that he was wrong. Looking up he said, excitedly:

"The wind is mocking me. It cannot be. Some sweet delusion deceives me. I fancied it was Viola. Oh, Viola, you haunt me night and day. I have you before me all the time. They cannot rob me of that poor consolation. Thank Heaven, thank Heaven! Oh! Viola, I embrace your phantom. Come to my arms—come, come!"

He extended his arms as he spoke, conjuring up the form of his beloved, and scarcely had he done so than he heard a voice reply to him:

"Bertie, Bertie!" it said, "I am here, my well-beloved, I am here!"

The next instant a body fell into his arms and he felt a hand patting his face, while loving lips sought his.

"Viola!" he stammered, his frame shaken to the centre. "Viola, am I dreaming? Is this an occasion of madness?"

"No, no; it is I—your own faithful, loving Viola!" was the reply. "I have escaped from Madame Menzies. Oh! my brain reels. You do not know what I have gone through, but we will never be separated again."

"I hope not, my darling; but Lord Tarlington seems to have long arms and is well served. However, I will pray that you may be unmolested."

"You will be with me, Bertie—that is all the protection I ask."

He turned his eyes—those poor, useless eyes—in her direction, and tried to look at her.

"I am blind, birdie," he said.

"I know it—what does that matter? We will be married to-morrow, Bertie, and I will never leave your side. I can work for both of us. If you are blind I am poor—for I have given up all my property to Lord Tarlington, and he has no longer any object in persecuting me. Did you think my love so worthless as for me to leave you in your distress?"

This speech so affected him that he could not speak for a little while. The tears came into his eyes, trembled on the lids, and then trickled slowly down his cheeks. She knelt at his feet, kissed his hands, loved him, pitied, soothed him, told him all that had happened, and soon made him as happy as the day was long, for he cared for nothing so long as she was his and would always be true to him.

But when he came to consider, he thought it very selfish of him to make this young and handsome woman link her fate with him. It was too great a sacrifice, and he told her so. He could go into a home, which was the proper place for such poor helpless wretches as he, and she could go into the world and shine in it as an ornament, which she deserved to be.

This she would not hear of. She scolded him for daring to talk to her in such a way; and, after a little struggle, he abandoned that line of argument. She was his and he must be hers. It was useless to fight against what must be. Hearing Viola, Lucy came out and was delighted to see Viola, whom she welcomed as one back from the dead.

Soon afterwards Sandford Newton arrived, and he was no less enthusiastic in his reception than his wife had been. When he heard Viola's story he was very indignant, and, without stopping for any dinner, hastened to the Rosary to arrest Madame Menzies and Miss Agnew, against whom he thought a charge of conspiracy could legally be made.

The old servant answered his somewhat noisy summons, and asked him what he wanted. He at once asked for her mistress.

"Where's your mistress, woman?" he asked.

"I ain't in no distress, sir," she replied, "thank you. I'm only a little hard of hearing."

"I didn't say that. Where's the person who employed you?" Sandford exclaimed, raising his voice.

"There's no one going to destroy me, sir," answered the woman, putting her hand up to her ear.

"You're foolish," he shouted. "I say, you're foolish."

"Yes; it's a long time since I went to school, sir. Do you want to see missus?"

"Of course I do."

"Then she's gone away and won't be back for a month. I'm on board wages and have to mind the house."

Sandford was furious at hearing this. Thinking the old woman might be trifling with him, he pushed her on one side and searched the house thoroughly. There was nothing to be seen

of Madame Menzies or Miss Agnew. They had evidently stolen quietly away so soon as the house was clear; and where they had gone was a mystery.

He went to the railway station but could gain no intelligence there of the parties of whom he was in search, and he concluded to call on Mr. Smyley.

The clergyman received him coldly, listened to his statement with the utmost indifference and incredulity, ending by informing him that he was perfectly satisfied of the truth of the confession which had been placed in his hands by Miss Harcourt herself.

"I have sent it by a special messenger to Lord Tarlington," he added; "and I trust that before long he will be in possession of his own again, as he has been unjustly kept out of it too long. I may add, young gentleman, that it will be well for you to moderate your zeal in behalf of this adventures, as his lordship would be justified in indicting you for conspiring with her to deprive him of his rights."

"But I am the son of S. Newton, my good sir," answered Sandford; "and I know all the facts."

"So much the worse for you," retorted Mr. Smyley, curtly.

"Is a girl to be persecuted because she is poor?" said Sandford, angrily. "Lord Tarlington has made several."

The Reverend Mr. Smyley interrupted him.

"I will not hear you," he cried. "Please leave my house before I call my servants to eject you."

"Surely, sir, as a minister of the gospel and a magistrate holding the commission of a justice of the peace, you—"

"I refuse to listen to you, sir," said Mr. Smyley, ringing the bell violently.

"Then all I can say is that you are a prejudiced, stupid old man, and a disgrace to the cloth you wear," rejoined Sandford.

He put his hat on his head and left the house, seeing that it was useless to plead with the clergyman for Viola, against whom he seemed to entertain a very strong antipathy. It was in a gloomy mood that he returned to the Hall, but he found Lucy playing the piano, while Viola and Herbert were sitting side by side and hand in hand on the sofa, looking as happy as if there was no such thing as care or want in this cold world of ours.

So he had his dinner and refrained from talking business. Viola, however, wanted to know what he had done, and what he thought Lord Tarlington would do. His answer was very simple.

"He will turn us out," he said. "An action for ejectment will be commenced, or he will institute criminal proceedings. I am afraid the law will not help us. It is true that the confession was wrung from you by duress, but in the absence of Madame Menzies and Miss Agnew we can prove nothing, yet I should advise you to stay as long as possible."

"Why?" inquired Herbert.

"Because going away will be a token of weakness, and possession is nine points of the law. Let us hold the fort just as long as we can."

This advice was acted upon. As soon as they could do so a special license was procured and Herbert Conyers was married to Viola. On returning from the church the bride and bridegroom sat down with Sandford and Lucy to a quiet little wedding breakfast, which they enjoyed as much as if it had been graced by all the notabilities in the peerage.

Viola sat by Herbert's side and held his hand in hers. He said he liked to feel her near him, as he could not see her, and she seldom wandered from his side. It appeared to be her sole delight to give him pleasure, and to try to make him forget his awful affliction.

Sandford was in high spirits. He shook hands with the newly-married couple, sent the servants out of the room, opened the wine himself, and when the glasses were foaming with champagne, got up to make a speech.

"I want to say a few words on the present occasion," he exclaimed, "because I feel it is

my duty. My feelings carry me away. I am happy myself, and I like to see others happy. I believe firmly that we shall see a way out of our difficulties in time. I say our difficulties because I identify Lucy and myself with Mr. and Mrs. Conyers. Heaven bless them. Viola has proved herself a true woman and an ornament to her sex. It is always darkest before dawn. Let us live in hope. We will drink the health of the bride and bridegroom. Heaven bless them again, and confusion to Lord Tarlington."

He had scarcely raised the glass to his lips when he heard a voice sharp and sour exclaim behind him:

"Ah! what is this? Confusion to Lord Tarlington. Humph! I cannot drink to that!"

Turning round he saw that a thin, dark man, dressed in a black frock coat, had entered the room without being announced.

"Who are you, sir?" he demanded.

"I have a card in my pocket," was the reply. "Servants all making merry downstairs, so I took the liberty of entering."

He fumbled in his pocket for a card.

(For Continuation see page 66.)

TIME'S REVENGE; OR, FOILED AT THE LAST.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE IRONY OF FATE.

A heavy damp has soiled my spirits,
And, like a heavy weight,
Hangs on their active springs. DRYDEN.

SOME eminent poet or philosopher has said, in appropriate terms, that everything will come to an end if we only wait long enough. That first evening which Miss Allenby had passed under her father's roof at last dragged itself to a close. An intensely unpleasant, mortifying evening it had proved to Beattie. Everything had shaped itself so differently to the pictures sketched hastily by her vivid young imagination.

The stately dinner was a puzzle and a bother to her. She sat silently at table, bewildered by the little forms and ceremonies, the lights, the servants, the constant changes of dishes, the stiff etiquette, amounting almost to pomp, the bewildering novelty of all about her. She was too much perplexed to be able to arrive at any clearidea, but instinctively found herself treated as the merest nobody at her father's table. Before coming, even when startled by the information that her anticipated place as mistress was occupied by a stranger, she had not imagined that she would be allowed (or driven) to feel herself an absolute cipher.

Lady Allenby devoted her attention exclusively to Jessie Rochester, ignoring Beattie. Sir Hubert remained perfectly quiet, displaying only a feeble interest in what was going on. Uncle Gerald, her knight a few short hours since, deserted her, and seemed to have no eye for anybody but Jessie Rochester, while Eric was as bad. Beattie had never looked more royal; her aspect was that of a queen in exile. But her beauty was wasted on the desert air.

In the drawing-room the same thing went on. Miss Allenby sat by a table, trying to pretend to turn over books, albums, and portfolios, as if she had been a young child admitted on sufferance. Jessie sat down to the pianoforte and played, and, in a rich mezzo soprano, sang showy French and Italian songs—altogether carrying off all the honours as prima donna of the evening.

Beattie played like a schoolgirl, and although she had a lovely voice, and was familiar with some good music, her vocal powers had never been cultivated. During a pause, while Jessie and her two attendant squires were talking and laughing by the piano, Lady Allenby approached Beattie with that exasperating air of patronage

and "kindness" so intensely galling under any circumstances.

"You look sadly jaded and out of spirits, my dear," she said, smiling. "The long journey has been too much for you. The air, the fatigue, the excitement, are so apt to tell on young travellers. I am afraid it is very dull for you here. But pray endeavour to feel as if you were at home. I am greatly pleased to see you."

Then Lady Allenby sailed away, her silken skirts rustling with a serpentine "swish," and Beattie felt rather like a rabbit which has just been smiled on by a boa-constrictor. For the first time in her life, she was seized with a savage fit of spite.

Presently Jessie, apparently ashamed of monopolising the general company, went over to Beattie's corner, followed by her devoted cavaliers. Beattie's coldness was pardonable, and Jessie tried to melt the ice by making some lively remarks on the book. She took up one, opening it at random, and read aloud some very pretty verses in French.

As she finished, Gerald uttered a few rapid sentences in French to her, with a significant, smiling look. Beattie could barely stumble through an average French book by the aid of the friendly, if occasionally deceptive, dictionary, and could hardly totter beyond the "Parley voo" stage in conversation.

Consequently, she caught nothing of the observation beyond the unexpected name of Percy Darvill. Gerald kept his eyes rivetted on Jessie's face. Beattie glanced rapidly and suspiciously from one to the other, her heart, suddenly beginning to beat with discomforting quickness. Even in the soft, subdued light of the wax candles, it was evident that Jessie flushed rose-red, apparently from annoyance.

"Indeed!" was all the reply she vouchsafed.

Gerald had merely mentioned that he had met Percy Darvill a day or two before, in order to test the effect his name would have on Jessie, and to mystify and annoy Beattie. But Beattie did not know this, and her jealous eyes instantly detected the deepened colour on Jessie's face. At length Beattie, to her infinite relief, found herself alone in her bedroom.

Lady Allenby evidently forgot all about her. Not a human being appeared to inquire if she needed any service. Youth at the prow, and good health at the helm, speedily floated the young girl off to the realms of sleep, and she was one of the happy privileged beings who never dream.

The habit of seventeen or eighteen years wakened Beattie at her usual hour. Like the majority of people who have slept in "a strange place," her first sensation was one of bewilderment. The next was a feeling of cold discomfort and unaccountable anger against someone, unremembered and so unnamed for a moment. Then full consciousness and recollection rushed on her, like a splash of ice-cold water.

Accustomed to almost irksome regularity, Beattie hastily jumped up, and running to the dressing-table, looked at her watch. Unluckily, she had forgotten to wind it up the night before, and in just retribution, she now found herself in utter ignorance of the time. A disquieting thought occurred to her that she had forgotten to ask at what hour she ought to present herself at the breakfast table. Miss Ibbotson had always been exacting in the matter of punctuality, and Beattie's knowledge of the world was not sufficient to tell her that all controllers of households were not cut out on the same model.

"They will be sure to call me when breakfast time comes," she said to herself, re-assuringly. "If I had overleapt myself, they would probably have awakened me, or they may have imagined I felt tired, and wanted a little longer rest."

She looked out, trying to discover from the aspect of the morning what the possible hour might be. On a sunlit June morning this was a perplexing task. A glow of pure pale golden light flooded the wide piece of pleasure ground which the window of the room overlooked.

The unexpected stately beauty of the scene rivetted Beattie for a few moments. A profound silence lay like a spell; it was like a spot in fairyland, or some far region of dreamland, and the girl's heart swelled half with pride, half with bitterness.

Beattie was about to give up the attempt at discovering the hour in despair, when two long grey-green shadows fell on the mossy lawn, and in a moment more two figures appeared, slowly walking, a little white dog scampering round and round them. Beattie recognised in one figure Eric, Lady Allenby's son, the other was unknown, but from his garb, and the long rake in his hand, he was apparently the gardener.

"It must be late, or that little fop would not be up and out in the morning air," said Miss Allenby, to herself, cynically. "I must make haste."

For a minute or two she debated the advisability of ringing the bell, and trying in that way to bring one of the servants to her aid. But a certain shyness, and the idea that it might be only about six o'clock, or perhaps earlier, deterred her from the attempt.

With some hurry she accomplished the moderately easy task of her girlish toilette, and then opened one of the sections of the wide window, letting in the fresh, fragrant air. She looked out, forgetting her worries under the influence of the exhilarating beauty of the morning.

Eric had disappeared, and the pleasure ground was a solitude once more. It was all strange, and by no means pleasing. It was hard to be armed at all points, ready and eager for breakfast—truth to tell, she felt desperately hungry—downright inquisitive about all and everything about the place, within her father's house, and yet to be little better than a prisoner in her room.

At The Sycamores the girls had been as free as the pigeons which circled round at their own will and pleasure. Tired of looking out of the window, Beattie walked round the room, and examined everything.

Tired of that she suddenly pounced on her bundle of railway volumes, and attempted to read. Tired of this, for it was impossible to fix her attention, she resolved, as she saw writing materials on a little table, to write a letter to Aunt Prue.

She had just dipped her pen in the ink, and was looking at the Altenham note paper and envelopes with childish admiration, when someone knocked. Beattie jumped up, with the view of running to the door and opening it. Second thoughts suggested that this would be undignified, so she called out in her grandest manner:

"Come in."

Her heart fluttered a little, half hoping, half fearing, Lady Allenby would answer the invitation in person. Not the stately figure of that important personage filled the doorway, however, but a plump little housemaid, with a good-humoured, pretty little round face, carrying the inevitable can of hot water and a tea tray.

"You up, miss?" this girl exclaimed, in apparent astonishment.

"What is the time?" asked Beattie.

"Miss?"

"What o'clock is it?"

"Oh! It's just gone eight, miss."

"What time do my fa—what time ought I to go down to breakfast?"

"The breakfests' always laid for half-past nine, miss, but nobody never hardly goes down. Mrs. Dysett thought maybe you'd like a cup of tea now, so I've abridged it to you, miss, and here's sugar and cream, and a teeny little bit of bread and butter."

"Thank you—you are very kind and thoughtful," said Beattie, a feeling half of anger, half of real gratitude, serving to partly strangle her voice.

"Anything more, miss?"

Beattie hesitated.

"I don't know my way down to the breakfast room," she owned willingly. "If—"

"If you rings when you're ready, miss, I'll come and show you."

The girl went away, taking with her the transient gleam of companionship she had brought. Beattie set her watch right, drank her tea, and tried to go on with her letter. But it was impossible to write. She felt irritable and mortified, and could not write with tranquillity.

At all hazards, she resolved to take a ramble through the house. Opening the door softly, she listened for signs of any other living being besides herself. The house might have been one of Anne Radcliffe's haunted castles, judging by the utter silence. She tried to remember which way she had come from the drawing-room the night before, and so return there, attracted by the superb piano which Jessie Rochester had shown to such advantage.

Corridors seemed to cross each other confusedly, and at first she had some difficulty in fixing her recollections. But after awhile, she happened to find the way, and came to the wide staircase leading to the drawing-room. As she walked softly, poor Beattie felt most uncomfortably like a marauder who had stolen in. This was not like home. The only face that had really smiled a welcome on her was the one poor insignificant servant whose very name she did not know.

Just as her foot touched the first stair, the subdued sound of laughing voices arrested her. Mirth seemed out of its right place in this sombre dwelling. Beattie leaned over, and peered in the most undignified manner. A cloud of housemaids pervaded the drawing-room, in and out, piling chairs outside the door, logging furniture and rugs about, and turning everything topsy turvy, as only housemaids can.

Beattie turned, and fled with precipitation, dreading to be seen, and hurried along the wide corridors, until she lost the sound of the voices. Unable and unwilling to return to her late prison cell she went on, led partly by curiosity, until suddenly she came on an open door, from which a long flight of steps ran down to the garden. Beattie walked with some faint misgiving down these steps; she could not tell where she was, nor how to inquire her way.

It was nearly half-past nine now, and she had always been taught to regard unpunctuality as an eighth cardinal sin. She felt thoroughly dissatisfied and uncomfortable; in her loneliness she would have welcomed Aunt Prue's hard, woody face with rapture. For the first time in her life she found herself the merest nobody. Her thoughts were all disagreeable; even the hitherto pleasant one of Percy Darvill was flavoured with bitterness, for she could not help being influenced by Gerald Allenby's hints.

She had hardly walked a yard or two along the garden walk when more laughing voices met her ear, and Miss Rochester, in company with Eric, abruptly wheeled round the corner. Miss Rochester was dressed in her riding habit; she was apparently in the best spirits, and gay as Euphrosyne.

"Good morning, Miss Allenby," she cried. "I hope you do not feel tired after your journey yesterday. We have had a delightful canter, your brother and I. We have come back fearfully hungry. I am sure you would have enjoyed the ride, if you had been with us. Do you ride?"

The relationship she had pointed out startled both Eric and Beattie; neither had, as yet, regarded the other in a fraternal light. It was with divided attention that Beattie acknowledged her ignorance of the equestrian art.

"I shall be delighted to teach you," said Jessie, pleasantly. "My lessons will be given from a selfish motive, because I really want somebody to ride with. I hate nearly all the girls about the place," she added, with a smile that robbed the confession of half its enormity. "It is breakfast time; I am frightfully hungry."

"Perhaps you will hate me like the rest of the girls when you know a little more of me," said Beattie, who, on her side, did not by any means reciprocate the feeling of friendliness expressed by Miss Rochester.

Jessie looked at her for a moment full in the face—almost fixedly, gazing straight into the depths of her eyes—then frankly said:

"Oh, no I shan't. Come along," and taking hold of her arm led her into the breakfast-room, which opened on that side of the garden.

Eric followed. This morning he had, to a great extent, dropped the lackadaisical manner which had, the previous night, so much prejudiced Beattie against him; but still she did not like him.

Beattie's heart again fluttered as she went into the room. She wondered if Lady Allenby would be kinder this morning; she longed to see her father again, for she had scarcely had any opportunity of discovering what manner of man he really was.

As she followed Jessie she darted a swift glance round the room, but, partly to her disappointment, partly to her relief, no one was visible but Gerald Allenby. He was standing on the hearth-rug, the "Times" in his hand.

Gerald threw down his paper, and advancing eagerly, greeted Miss Rochester with anxious gallantry, nodding kindly to Beattie, and with marked coldness to Eric. Miss Rochester received his salutations with the easy bonhomie that distinguished her; Beattie was half sulky, remembering his desertion of the night before, and Eric gave him back his cool greeting with interest.

"You must not be disappointed, my dear niece, if you do not see your father and—Lady Allenby until—for some hours," said Gerald to Beattie. "They seldom appear at breakfast."

As he spoke, however, Sir Hubert entered the room. He looked worn and weary. Beattie fluttered to him, but he merely smiled languidly at her, and lightly touched her forehead with his lips. Had she been a visitor in whom he felt no interest, he could scarcely have displayed more indifference.

They all sat down to breakfast. Had it not been for the sunny presence of Jessie Rochester they would have made a gloomy party. She was naturally of a cheerful temper, had no personal cares to disturb her serenity, and was selfish enough not to care to look below the surface of the waters when they lay smooth and untroubled.

Although she never said anything worth listening to, she was always pleasant, and talked agreeable nonsense without being silly, and could talk with easy commonplace about people, books and things with a certain "air."

Probably from having been chiefly accustomed to the society of her father and brother, she was more like a well-bred man perfectly at ease, than a handsome girl of eighteen or twenty. Without being actually rude to her, Eric took scarcely any notice of Beattie.

Gerald was very civil, but chiefly devoted himself to Jessie, to whom he paid all possible court. Sir Hubert joined in the general talk without directing any special attention to anybody. His thoughts seemed preoccupied by some one engrossing subject, although he made an effort to show an interest in external things.

After breakfast Sir Hubert told the girls that Lady Allenby would be pleased to see them in her sitting-room. Eric had an appointment at the rectory; he was doing some heavy reading under the rector's supervision.

"I should be glad if you would come with me to the study," said Sir Hubert to Gerald. "I want to speak to you on some matters of importance."

"Farms, sans doute," commented, or surmised Gerald, as he smilingly made a movement as if to attend his nephew. "I hope he has made his will. Looks awfully bad; white as a ghost, and seems so weak. Perhaps he'll die intestate, and then I shall—hump! no such good luck lies before me."

Jessie made a slight sign as if to induce Beattie to lead the way, but Beattie, partly from shyness, partly from pique, drew back a little haughtily. Jessie, never at a loss, and never out of temper, gaily linked her hand on Beattie's arm and drew her out of the room.

"Come along," she said; "I know the way perhaps better than you do. I never knew anything about you till yesterday," she went on,

in her blunt way. "You must tell me all about yourself, for I warn you I am a perfect Mrs. Lot or Mrs. Barbe-Bien in the way of inquisitiveness, to say nothing of being a shabby replica of grandmother Eve."

Beattie felt so defiant and out of humour with all the world that she was in no mood to reciprocate the kindly advances thus made, especially when offered by one who was supposed to be much admired by Percy Darvill.

The reception accorded by Lady Allenby to Jessie and to herself did not soften this asperity. Lady Allenby smiled languidly at her, with a few muttered words which sounded like "How d'ye do?" but she held out her arms to Jessie, who glanced out of the tail of her eye at Beattie as if mockingly, and having secured that young lady, nothing less than half-a-dozen kisses would satisfy her. It happened that Miss Rochester hated being kissed, and rarely volunteered any caresses.

"My sweet, sweet darling," cried Lady Allenby, "sit down by me and tell me how you have amused yourself this morning. I have sent a message to your dear papa, and I hope he will come for you."

"Thanks," said Jessie, drily, sitting down.

Beattie wandered off to the window under pretence of gazing at the view; but her eyes were full of indignant tears, which blurred out the piece of garden and picturesque woodland beyond. For the first time in her life she hated with a vehemence that surprised her unaccustomed heart. Equally capable of ardent love and hearty hatred, she felt downright spiteful against her stepmother.

"How dares she treat me so?" she said to herself, passionately. "Oh, how I wish I could have stayed with Aunt Prue. Poor old Aunt Prue, we thought nothing of her while we lived with her, poor Fayette and I, and imagined The Sycamores was the dullest old place ever invented; but it was paradise compared to this horrid desert."

Her heart yearned to the old days, to the dreamy routine, to fanciful reveries of Percy Darvill, to delicious exchanges of confidences with Fayette, to playful battles with Putty, to countless reminiscences; and her heart rose rebelliously.

Jessie Rochester noticed the uncourtous, if not unfeeling, conduct of Lady Allenby, and her fullest sympathies went out to Beattie, whose dark figure stood out against the sun-lighted windows in a curious kind of masterful relief. Lady Allenby was going the wrong way if she desired to engage the affection, or even ordinary liking, of this open-hearted girl. And the most imprudent action Lady Allenby ever committed in her life was making an enemy of Beattie.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SECRET WRITING.

Our restless passions, like tempests on the main,
Drive reason from the guidance of our lives,
And leave us shipwrecked on a bar'rous coast.
SOUTHWELL.

GERALD ALLENBY followed Sir Hubert into the library. The latter closed the door, sat down, and signed to his uncle to sit near him.

"I do not feel equal to entering on a long conversation," said Sir Hubert. "I will endeavour to speak as briefly as I can. In a word, I wish—I intend to make a new will."

"Indeed!"

"I made a will some years ago," Sir Hubert continued, "when I was living in India. At that time I hardly ever thought of you, my dear fellow. I hardly—in truth, I never for a moment imagined I should ever possess Altham and its belongings. I took it for granted that my father would provide handsomely for you in making his will. It is, of course, a painful subject, his singular treatment of you—but we must not enter on that."

Gerald suddenly rose, and walked to and fro as if violently agitated, then sat down, but he

bent his head to conceal the flush that rose to his face. Had his nephew observed this emotion it would have been fully accounted for by the natural feeling of mortification aroused by the remembrance of his brother's conduct towards him. Sir Hubert, however, was entirely preoccupied. He was searching for some papers in a heap of odds and ends on the table.

"I have written to my solicitor—Fielding, you know, of Lincoln's Inn," Sir Hubert went on, still turning over the papers, "and he sent me word this morning that he would come to-day. I believe you and he are not acquainted?"

"No. Can I assist you?"

"I have found what I was looking for," said Sir Hubert, as he suddenly drew a small memorandum book from beneath a pile of letters. "It is an old note-book belonging to Sir Randal. Can you read cypher—secret writing?"

"I am a poor hand at that kind of thing," said Gerald. "Some cyphers I can manage to make a guess at. But why do you ask?"

"I will tell you; but it does not signify, as Fielding says he has a copy, or rather translation, of the memorandum I wished to decipher. I ought to tell you that some days ago I had a very serious conversation with Dr. Astley, and—"

"Doctors pretend to know everything, and they are just as ignorant as the rest of the world," said Gerald, as his nephew hesitated.

"I do not need any medical man to warn me. But Dr. Astley told me that my life hangs on a thread. My general health is in a very precarious state, and the slightest shock or even strong agitation may result in—in sudden, instantaneous death."

There was a profound silence, a stillness so deep that the faint, silver-toned ticking of the black marble clock sounded like a painful throbbing through the old oak-panelled room. Sir Hubert looked at Gerald, under the mistaken idea that he was overcome by the words just spoken; but Gerald, as he shaded his face with his hands, was rapidly thinking of his own position, and of all the possible advantages that might arise to benefit him.

"But," Sir Hubert resumed, in a cheerful tone, "it is worse than useless to meet trouble half way. I may add, before we end this branch of our talk together, that I am anxious no one, especially my wife and daughter, should be made aware of this distressing matter. I should like you to look at this memorandum, which Fielding says is of the utmost importance."

He opened the little book at a certain page and handed it to Gerald.

"Fielding will be here in half an hour, so it does not matter. Only I feel curious to know what it is about," he added, comparing his watch with the timepiece.

His attention was thus for a moment diverted, or he might have been startled by the effect which the open page of secret writing produced on Gerald. Had a hissing scorpion raised its menacing head before him that courtly gentleman could not have been more electrified. His knowledge of the cypher extended to only a few words here and there, but was sufficient to give him a clear idea of the subject written of.

At the top of the page was a date, neatly inscribed in small, cramped characters. Below that the initials "G. A.," then the words, "Would that I had died before I saw this day!" After that followed the writing in cypher, which looked like Arabic characters, but which in reality was a cypher partly invented by the old baronet.

Gerald looked round the room several times with the expression of some wild animal caught in a trap, and then glanced at his nephew, fearful lest his strange behaviour should have betrayed him. Sir Hubert, however, not wishing to interrupt his attempt to read the secret memorandum, had turned away towards the great open fireplace, and was lighting a cigar.

"Risen from the grave to confront me," muttered Gerald, rising, his right hand clenching and opening, as if he would strike, yet felt his utter helplessness. "What shall I do? Remain here and have the ashes of the past flung in my face?"

A smothered oath escaped him, and he flung the book on the table.

"Can you read it, Gerald?" asked Sir Hubert, turning towards him. "You spoke, I think?"

"I cannot read it," said Gerald; "I do not know anything to which it might refer. Has—has Fielding any copy of this? Why did he—what did he—"

In spite of every effort to control his agitation, his voice failed him. Sir Hubert believed him to be still painfully affected by their conversation, and felt a strong gratitude for so much sympathy.

"Fielding has a copy, as I told you just now," he said. "However, it is probably nothing. These fellows are so fond of making mountains out of molehills. I have as small a belief in lawyers as you have in doctors. Oh, if you don't mind waiting I want to go round to the stables for a few minutes. Somebody managed to lame my poor little May Flower yesterday morning, and I want to see how she is going on. I shall be fit for nothing after the interview with Fielding."

Sir Hubert placed the note-book in a drawer, and went out by the door leading into the garden. Gerald made a swift movement to open the drawer where the fatal book was lying, then paused.

"And supposing I destroy it, or secrete it," he muttered, his hand half extended; "what gain will that be to me? If Fielding knows—why, he must know. Shall I burn this terrible piece of evidence against me? Well, I could deny all knowledge of it, then Hubert would probably think he had put it down in absence of mind, and could not remember. It would be dangerous, but within an hour he will know as much as this could tell him, and then, why, of course there is nothing left for me but ignominious flight. I can read only a word or two, but the whole story is written down. Let me see."

He pulled open the drawer, glancing around like a stealthy thief, and took out the book with a trembling hand. A footstep startled him, and he heard the gay voices of Miss Rochester and Beattie as they passed the door. Like a thief he quickly and softly stepped across the room, treading on the rugs lest his footfall should raise an echo on the waxed floor, then shot the well-oiled bolt. He dreaded to be interrupted; he wanted time to think out a very difficult problem.

The girls appeared to make no attempt to enter the library; the echo of their light footsteps died away, but in a few moments their voices sounded outside, and their pretty figures were seen on the lawn. Beattie seemed as gay as her companion, and was entering with spirit into a lively, childish game of battledore and shuttlecock. Not a care appeared to cloud her bright face; all her late worries had apparently vanished. A few words of girlish confidence from Jessie Rochester had set her heart in a glow.

At any other time Miss Rochester would have drawn Gerald Allenby to her side as a magnet attracts steel. The one solitary pure feeling that had ever entered the evil heart of this man, shining like a ray of sunlight into a dark prison-house, was an ardent love for this high-spirited girl.

This feeling was strongly alloyed by mercenary calculations. Miss Rochester was the owner, happily or unhappily for herself, of a large fortune, and this was a powerful lure to the baser nature of Mr. Allenby. But at the same time, had she been penniless, and he a monarch, he would have stepped from his throne, as did King Cophetua, and knelt at her feet as the humblest of woodcoats.

In his agitation he had forgotten Jessie, but his most bitter enemy could not have invented a more painful additional pang wherewith to heighten the anguish of mind already rending him than the sight of her careless, happy figure sporting in the sunshine.

His face, ordinarily so calm, so suave and smiling, was so distorted by rage and despair as to have almost lost its beauty. In a moment or two, he sank back in one of the great oak

chairs, and laying his arms on the table, hid his head on them.

Even in his despair he did not relinquish his clutch of the note-book which had so unexpectedly flashed upon him, like an accusing angel, but held it fast. The laughing voices died away, and nothing save the rustling of the leaves without, and the ceaseless tick-tick of the timepiece within, broke the profound silence.

The soft movement of the leaves was like the faint pleadings of pity. The stern voice of the timepiece was like the firm accents of justice. Gerald rose, and looked about him, trying to shake off the stupor which overwhelmed him. It seemed almost as if a week had passed since he had entered this room.

With a violent effort he endeavoured to rally his reasoning powers together; but it was impossible to form any judgment as to the way he should take. The air of the room seemed close and stifling.

In his over-excited state, his nerves being suddenly strung up to the highest tension, he felt as if the walls were slowly closing in upon him. He felt as if he should swoon away if he remained here.

At the momentarily conjured-up idea of his fainting fit, he laughed aloud. One of his peculiarities was a soft, silvery laugh, low and melodious. He laughed rarely, but his laughter was pleasant to hear. The echo of this laughter in the gloomy old room aroused him, like a splash of scented waters, and he looked once more about him, as if suddenly awakened. With a sudden impulse, rather than a fixed resolution, he thrust the little black-covered book into his pocket, and stepped out into the radiant sunshine.

The only thing to be done was to let himself be guided by circumstances. As far as he could see, before the evening mists fell on this tranquil scene, he would either be a disgraced outcast from his birthplace, or allowed to remain, despised, worse than an outcast, his presence endured "for the sake of the family honour." No state is perhaps more terrible than that of the self-convicted soul, before open accusation has been made.

Adam, hiding in the garden, is surely a more tragic figure than when standing forth for condemnation. While Cain yet felt his brother's blood warm upon his hands, he must have suffered more than when the accuser's voice rang in his ears.

The sound of voices aroused Gerald Allenby's attention, as he slowly walked, his head drooping, his mind painfully preoccupied. Not the melodious voices of gay laughing girls, this time.

He looked up, his nephew was coming in the direction of the library, accompanied by a gentleman who was to Gerald a stranger, but who, he instantly surmised, must be Mr. Fielding. A tall, thin, grave-looking man, with a wiry, graceful figure and a still youthful face; but whose hair and beard were silver white.

Sir Hubert, although a tall man, was shorter by some inches than the man who walked by his side, and although in reality middle-aged, looked of a far younger generation. He spoke with a certain deference, too, as if desirous of being guided, rather than with the air of a man about to issue what professional men term "instructions."

With a terrified instinct of concealment Gerald darted behind a clump of trees. He dared not meet the two who approached. For the first time in his life, he stooped to be an eaves-dropper, and by one of those curious mockeries in life which are always defying wisdom and experience, he proved the rule wrong which asserts that listeners never hear good of themselves. Both gentlemen passed close to his hiding-place.

"I am very much attached to my relative, Gerald Allenby," Sir Hubert was saying, in his somewhat measured way. "I feel that he has been unjustly treated, and although I would judge no one, yet—"

Then they passed. Gerald had gained nothing by his act of degradation—knew



[A GREAT LADY'S CAPRICE.]

nothing more. Through the stems of the trees, he watched his nephew and the solicitor, as they moved nearer to the library, nearer to the place which to him must be a bar of judgment.

Sir Hubert appeared to monopolise the dialogue. Mr. Fielding seemingly listened, his stately head slightly averted. Therefore the unhappy watcher could not see the expression on his face.

At the glass doors leading from the garden to the dim old oak-panelled library, the two dark figures paused. Gerald's hands clenched until the movement pained him. As he watched the men who held his fate in their hands, his heart seemed to stand still.

Then they entered the room, disappearing out of the bright summer sunshine. At that instant the laughing voice of Jessie Rochester struck on his ear. She was calling to Beattie, joyous as a child, delighted with her newly-found friend.

"Miss Allenby?" the ringing voice exclaimed, "see, here is such a lovely butterfly, with gold and purple wings, such a perfectly gorgeous creature; do come and look; I want to catch it—it is such fun chasing butterflies, if it is babyish."

At any moment Miss Rochester might discover him, and to be detained at this time, even by her, would be to lose the chance of hearing or seeing something of the fatal interview now taking place.

Thoroughly familiar with the grounds, he knew every turn, and adroitly withdrawing to an arched side path, he swiftly moved by some circuitous walks to an avenue of trees leading to the door belonging to what was called the Peacock Hall.

His object was to gain a conservatory built out from the library, where if he chose, he could see all that passed, and appear or escape as might be imperatively dictated by remorseless Fate.

As he paused for an instant on the threshold, he remembered that even now he might be

frustrated, for either the gardener or Lady Allenby might be in the conservatory. Lady Allenby had chosen to "take a fancy to the place," as she said herself, and if she had selected this particular hour for her irregular visit, his hope of being present invisibly at the interview between Sir Hubert and Mr. Fielding would be crushed.

Moving with a stealthy step, he listened, creeping along noiselessly. Only the screaming of some foreign birds in a large aviary disturbed the sleepy silence. No human being seemed near.

Gerald advanced cautiously, watching the entrance from the great hall as he crept forward until he reached the doorway communicating with the library. As he lifted his hand to draw aside the heavy curtain which divided the conservatory from the library, he heard the echo of low, earnest voices, speaking rapidly and excitedly.

His hand fell by his side, although he had caught no word. Then he cursed himself savagely for his cowardice, and again lifting his hand, drew back the heavy crimson folds of the drapery, and peered in.

Sir Hubert was sitting in the big oaken chair by the library table, or rather lying back. His face was ashy white, his thin, delicate hands rested as if helplessly on the carved arms of the chair.

Mr. Fielding was leaning forward, some paper in his hand, an eager, yet stern expression on his face. He was speaking quickly, Sir Hubert was listening with profound attention. The room was so long, and Mr. Fielding was speaking in such rapid, subdued tones, that in spite of every effort to strain his powers of hearing, he was unable to catch more than an occasional broken sentence.

Mr. Fielding ceased speaking for a moment or two, while searching in an inner pocket of his coat for something. Then he drew forth a letter, which he placed on the desk in front of Sir Hubert, a strange, pitiful look on his face. Sir Hubert, before attempting to read this

letter, passed his hand feebly over his forehead.

Then, as if wearily, he took up the letter, and read it steadily through. He laid it down, but as he did so, he half rose from his chair, and flung out his arms, as if struck by sudden blindness.

"Open the windows," he cried, so loudly that Gerald started back in terror, "I am stifled. Remember—"

Then he fell back heavily in his seat. Mr. Fielding, who had watched every movement, tried to catch him as he drooped backwards, and then, in alarm, rang the handbell which stood on the library table. No one came, for the old days had passed away and Sir Hubert rarely required any attendance while in the library, besides being a comparative stranger to Altenham and its servants.

Mr. Fielding, having hurriedly lifted Sir Hubert to a couch, and laid him at full length, sprinkling his face with cold water, rang the bell at the fireplace with a strong hand. Gerald, carried away by agitation and vague terror, mixed with undefined dread, hastily advanced from his place of concealment, and ran towards the couch where Sir Hubert lay motionless. Mr. Fielding, startled by so unexpected an apparition, gazed at him for an instant.

"Are you—are you—" he began, as if in uncertainty, "are you Mr. Allenby—Mr. Gerald Allenby?"

"Yes," replied Gerald, half defiantly.

"I fear Sir Hubert is dead."

"Dead?"

Gerald's heart throbbed, half with fear, half with cruel hope. At that moment two or three servants hurried in, alarmed by the violent summons.

"Go instantly for a doctor, for Dr. Astley," said Mr. Fielding. "And if possible, do not let Lady Allenby or Miss Allenby know that Sir Hubert is—*is ill*, until he comes."

(To be Continued.)



[THE MISSIVE.]

MYRA'S MASQUERADE. (A COMPLETE STORY.)

"THERE must be no more hesitation, Myra. You must accept Mr. Piers as your affianced husband before my return, which will be on Wednesday next. There must and shall be no more of this childish paltering. You are no daughter of mine unless you accept my wishes as your law, and if in this matter you do not you will no longer remain in my house."

Were those words, those harsh, cruel words really there, or were they illusions of the wistful tear-brimmed blue eyes whose gaze was fixed so painfully upon the letter which the long delicate fingers held in a grip of iron? Ah, yes, the words were only too truly there in which lay couched that bitter sentence which told a woman's heart that the terrible alternative lay before her either to blight the whole of her future life by one fatal step or to leave for evermore the home of her girlhood.

The face that bent over the paper was a very beautiful one. Not a face which could be described. What really beautiful countenance can? Enough that it was almost faultless in outline, of rare delicacy in tinting, and that the deep blue eyes with their long curved lashes harmonised delicately with the ruddy-golden hair which fringed the low pure brow and fell in soft wavelets to the cushion of the low settee on which the girl sat.

The December evening had long since closed in, and the pleasant drawing-room of Darrell Place looked very cosy with its warmth and many suggestions of luxury. Not too much light. That would perhaps have vulgarised the delicate and tasteful surroundings and the few choice pictures on the walls. The two silver sconces filled with waxen tapers which flanked the over-mantel at one end of the apartment gave just the right quantity of illumination to harmonise the contents of the room and to

enable Mrs. Darrell, as she sat by the fire, to proceed languidly with some fancy work of brightly-hued and fleecy wool.

Some of the light, too, fell on the face of a young man who sat opposite to the lady of Darrell Place, but it did not penetrate to the distant spot where Myra sat in her desolation sufficiently to enable the remote masculine eyes to discern the expression of acutest anguish upon the girl's face.

The sound of the voices of Mrs. Darrell and the gentleman conversing languidly fell upon Myra's ears like a distant inarticulate murmur. The girl hardly realised where she was. The cruel words which she read and re-read, without any will of her own, seemed to have benumbed her outward perceptions, as they had crushed her heart.

Presently the girl raised her eyes and glanced across the room to where Mrs. Darrell's companion was sitting. A smile of contempt curled Myra's short, delicate lip.

"Accept him," she murmured. "Go through life as his wife—his slave, rather—for that is what I should be. Such a life would be a living death. The prisoner whom the tyrant of old chained to a corpse could not have endured a torture so deep or so lasting as would be mine if I became the wife of Stephen Piers."

The face of the man of whom Myra spoke was turned suddenly in her direction. It was a very repellent visage. That of a man whom, while yet young, excess and selfishness had stamped with premature age. The brow was low, heavy, and wrinkled; the features coarse, the jaw cruel when beheld in profile, sensual when seen in front. The small eyes of a kind of olive brown were crafty yet fierce.

There was something, too, ineradicably plebeian—even low—about this man. His evening dress, although of finest material and West-end make, hung awkwardly upon a figure squat and ungainly, and the lavish display of jewellery which he made seemed only a foil to his own innate and apparent want of refinement.

"How evil and how cruel he looks," mused

Myra. "I can almost fancy that those crafty, serpent eyes of his have been looking over my shoulder to read papa's cruel decision, and that now he gloats over my wretchedness. Live with him!" and the girl's white, rounded shoulders gave an involuntary shiver. "No, that can never be. It would be hard to decide whether I hate or fear him most. I shudder at the contact of his fingers. I quail at the glance of his evil eyes, whose every glance seems to hold some blight. Shall I surrender up the hope and brightness of my young life to such a fate merely because Stephen Piers is rich and I am poor? I will never do it, come what may!"

Just then the soft voice of the elder lady was slightly elevated.

"Myra," said Mrs. Darrell, "come to the piano. Mr. Piers wishes you to sing one of your favourite songs."

Well modulated and pleasant as a casual hearer might have held Mrs. Darrell's voice to be, there run through each balanced intonation a curious cadence almost imperceptible, which, in its artificiality, seemed the index of an insincere spirit.

Myra rose from the couch on which she had been sitting. The action revealed that she was of tall and well-moulded form, in which the elastic slimness of girlhood was still dominant. But although she arose she made no movement towards the piano, which stood in a slight recess not far from the spot where Mr. Piers sat.

Her stepmother (for such was the relationship which Mrs. Darrell held to the girl) rose from her gossip chair, and crossed the room quickly to Myra's side.

"Did you hear me, girl?" she hissed into Myra's ear. "What do you mean by this insolent disobedience? Do as I command you instantly, or go to your own room."

There was a quick passing flash of defiance in the great blue eyes—a passionate reply quivered upon the red lips. Then, with an effort, Myra crossed to the instrument, hurriedly selected a piece of music from the well-stocked Canterbury, and sat down at the piano, which Mr. Piers had

already opened for her with rather pronounced officiousness.

The music Myra had selected was a song which she was well aware was one of Mr. Piers's aversions. Nor was that gentleman, as he took his stand in readiness to turn over the leaves, slow to detect the fact. While yet the prelude rippled out and ere a single word had been sung, his unpleasant countenance assumed an expression still more forbidding.

Myra sang the song in a listless, expressionless manner which did not improve matters. She was a finished vocalist, and possessed a soprano voice of great range and sweetness, but on this occasion her performance was very indifferent and hardly reached mediocrity.

From her chair by the fireside Mrs. Darrell watched her step-daughter with an eminently spiteful expression. It was clear that she had to put some restraint upon her feelings or the song would not have been allowed to reach its conclusion.

"I think, Myra," she exclaimed, with marked asperity, ere the last chord of the postlude died into silence, "that your selection of that unpleasant song was very singular, and I must say that when I bear in mind the trouble which Mr. Darrell has taken to secure for you the best professors, you might have something more of execution and manner than we should expect from a street ballad singer. When people listen to you in order to be pleased I am surprised you should so far neglect some pains to secure their gratification."

This attack was promptly seconded by Mr. Piers.

"It is rather singular, Miss Darrell," said that gentleman, with a pronounced discontent in his tone, "that you have quite forgotten that upon two previous occasions I expressed my dislike to that song. Pray sing something more pleasant."

Myra's face flushed hotly at Mr. Piers's dictatorial words and manner, but she made no reply, and drawing another piece of music from the receptacle, began to play. It was, however, no song which she had selected, but one of Beethoven's most abstruse studies filled with technical difficulties, and only appealing to the most cultured musicians.

Perhaps its very difficulty formed its claim to the girl's favour, and she hoped for relief from thought in the close attention which it demanded. Mr. Piers turned over the leaves, his morose discontented face meanwhile being a perfect study for the physiognomist.

But he had apparently planned his revenge—a revenge quite in character with the temper and want of breeding which were distinctive of him. Myra had scarcely finished, when bending over her as she sat on the music stool Stephen Piers suddenly threw his arms around the girl's slim waist, and before she could realise the possibility of conduct so utterly alien to all gentlemanly feeling, had pressed his thin hot lips on her pure brow, her rounded cheek, her rich lips.

As the girl realised the profanation and indignity, her horror and loathing broke out into a frantic struggle which released her from her assailant. Without a word Myra rushed madly from the room and flying up the staircase reached her own chamber and locked herself in.

With a hand trembling from indignation and excitement she poured out a basinful of water, and hastily plunged her heated and flushed face into the cool element. Again and again she repeated the act, as if by such lavage she would wash off the traces of those abhorred caresses.

Then Myra began to collect her thoughts. The girl had met her stepmother's gaze as she fled from the room, and notwithstanding the tumult of her mind had been struck by the cold smirk of satisfaction upon Mrs. Darrell's well-trained countenance.

Had this outrage been premeditated? Myra could scarcely doubt it. So sure of gaining her will was Mrs. Darrell, so sure of his prey was Mr. Piers, that the latter had not feared to resort to even so flagrant a breach of social propriety as his late act.

Doubtless they had reckoned upon the help-

less condition of the poor girl—she was only eighteen—now that her father had determined to bend her will to this marriage; but this action of Mr. Piers had had exactly the contrary effect.

Myra was not cowed and impelled towards submission thereby. On the contrary, her whole soul was up in arms against this man. Before she had disliked him strongly, now she hated and loathed him. Even yet the lustrations of water seemed ineffective to remove the polluting kisses.

Rather than have to receive similar caresses with wifely obedience Myra Darrell felt that she could endure all and everything of bitterness else—want, penury, beggary—ay, even death itself.

But how escape it? Well Myra knew that her father would keep his word. He had been the kindest of parents in the old solitary time after the first Mrs. Darrell's death, and when there was no successor to come between father and daughter.

But now all was changed. Caroline Darrell had set herself to humiliate the fair, proud girl whose youth and beauty she envied, and whose influence with Mr. Darrell she viewed with distrust. And she was not a woman to adopt half measures.

Under her simpering inanity and her usually colourless manner, she had a vicious tenacity of purpose. So far she had bent her husband to her will, and would she not continue so to do?

Myra paced her room in uncontrollable agitation, revolving such thoughts as these. Marry Stephen Piers she would not, and what was the alternative? Expulsion from her father's house, the home of her childhood. A sudden inspiration flashed into the girl's brain. Yes, she would do it. She would spare them that trouble.

Her just pride recoiled from the crowning humiliation that her stepmother should enjoy either the triumph of her submission or her repulse from the old loved roof. She would leave it, indeed, but of her own act and deed.

Her resolution once taken Myra was not one to hesitate. In her girlish frame beat a heart every jot as resolute as those which throbbed under the iron hauberk of her crusading ancestors. She glanced at the little French clock upon the mantelpiece. It indicated the hour of nine.

They were early people at Darrell Place, after the fashion of dwellers in remote country places. In half-an-hour Myra could calculate upon the household having retired to rest. At eleven o'clock she knew a train bound to the metropolis called at the small station of Wenmere, four miles from the Place. Yes, she could catch it.

The road was good, if lonely and desolate. Bitter as was the wind, no snow lay in the pathways, and to Myra, a country-bred girl, a four mile walk, even at so late an hour, had no great terror.

She unlocked her dressing-case. A smothered sob arose to her lips as she did so. For of the trinkets there some recalled the beloved mother who slept in the vault of the Darrells, and others had been her father's presents in happier times.

From another compartment Myra took a crisp bank-note for five pounds, the last instalment of her allowance as yet unchanged. Her purse contained a couple of pieces of gold. Ignorant as she was of the world, the girl felt that the supply was all insufficient for her venture. Carefully she selected from the open case the trinkets which she had herself bought at different times, and the few jewels of her mother's which her father had handed to her as suited for the wearing of an unmarried girl.

The more numerous and costly ornaments which had been that father's own gifts, Myra felt that she could not claim now as her own, when that parent had thrust her from his heart. The trinkets selected, and a few obvious necessities packed in a small hand bag, Myra sat down to await as patiently as she might the moment when she could make her escape.

Whatever indications there were of waking life in the quiet old manorhouse one by one dropped into silence. Myra could hear Mr. Piers leave the outer door, to which the groom had previously brought round his horse, and then the lessening beats of the animal's hoofs on the hardened ground.

Then she heard Mrs. Darrell ascend the stairs to her own room, pausing as she passed Myra's door, as if with some purpose of knocking or speaking quickly relinquished. Then the occasional sound of voices from the servants' hall ceased, and she could hear Joyce, the butler, making the round of the house and bolting and barring against burglars. Then all was still.

Myra permitted a short interval to elapse for safety. Then she silently unlocked her door, crept stealthily downstairs and into the dining-room, where in a cellaret she could find both wine and biscuits. A glass of sherry hastily swallowed, and a handful of wine-biscuits caught up to eat as she walked would serve to give her the needful strength for the midnight journey.

Cautiously then she unbarred the stout shutter, unclasped the French window, and opening it, stepped out on to the lawn. Free alike from Stephen Piers and Caroline Darrell—free, but homeless!

Myra closed the shutters and window so far as was practicable, and getting clear of the grounds of the mansion, sped rapidly along the frozen road. At some places where the trees interlaced their leafless skeleton branches overhead, some sensation of depression and timidity stole over her.

But once again under the unbroken starlight, with the rush of the free cold air in her face, Myra's heart rose, despite her friendless position. Plans of the future she made none as she pressed on.

They could wait. Her heart was mainly filled with a sensation of sudden relief from an over-haunting fear, mingled with which crept in as the space between herself and Darrell Place grew greater and yet greater, the fear that the shock of her disappearance might perchance be a blow even to the father who seemed to have lost his love for her.

Myra dropped the heavy fall which she had attached to her hat over her face before she entered the little station, although it was little likely that the clerk or porter would readily recognise her at that hour, and in her heavy waterproof ulster and coarse garden hat. But it was well to be careful. Ten minutes later Myra Darrell was whirled along at the rate of forty miles an hour to the big Babylon.

* * * * *

When the porter at the station of Wenmere had opened the door of a first-class carriage for Myra, her first feeling as she sank back, fatigued by her rapid walk, was that of having reached at least a temporary place of security. She hardly realised whether the compartment was occupied or not, although she was somehow half-conscious that some grumbling, semi-objuratory words in a masculine voice had struck upon her ears, to which, however, immediate silence had succeeded.

For a few seconds Myra sat staring out blankly at the fast retiring lamps of the station, visible round the curve made by the line, and then at the darkness spread over wood and field.

A slight noise aroused her from her trance-like reverie, and turning her gaze into the carriage Myra discovered that it had another occupant beside herself, a tall, broad-shouldered, frank-faced, tawny-moustached gentleman, who had just risen from his seat, nearly opposite to her, and had let down the farther window.

The sight of a little speck of red light whizzing out into the darkness of space and the apprehension that a certain odour of a choice Cabana hung upon the atmosphere of the carriage, showed Myra that the stranger had made a small sacrifice of his own pleasure for her sake, and, she thought, recalling the articulate sounds which she had heard on entering, had probably,

Englishman-like, done so with an Englishman's grumble.

Myra would have assured the stranger, with a woman's kindly duplicity, that the odour of tobacco, even in a close railway carriage, was not distasteful to her, but a sudden and curious shyness seemed to come over her, and she could not be the first to speak.

Meanwhile the young man resumed his seat, and wrapping the thick travelling-rug he held comfortably around him, closed his eyes in apparent sleep. Involuntarily Myra stole one or two swift timid glances at his face. It looked rather stern and thoughtful now the eyelids were closed, but altogether noble and manly in outline, in expression, and in the red bronze of its tint. Compared with the malignant visage with its doughy complexion and cruel serpent eyes of Stephen Piers, the countenance of this young man appeared heroic enough to recall those of the marble demigods which sprang to life under the marvellous chisel of the Greek sculptor.

Then the fugitive's eyes again sought the black blank beyond the closed window. It seemed a fit type of her future. There was another pair of eyes which found far better and more agreeable employment.

Verily, for a truthful and frank-hearted young fellow, thou playest the hypocrite sadly, Angus Oliphant—surely one of the last men whom one would suspect of the demure deceit of prolonged peeping at a pretty woman under half closed lids which the aforesaid pretty woman believed to be sealed in sleep.

Perhaps it struck young Oliphant as being a very harmless species of deceit; more likely he troubled himself with no casuistry about the matter. It was better than sleeping, and decidedly more pleasant than a reverie concerning the smoke rings of a cigar.

For Myra's face struck the young man at first sight as being rarely beautiful, and it grew upon him with much gazing. Once or twice during his furtive scrutiny it flashed across Angus Oliphant's mind that he had never so studied a woman's face before.

A curious sensation of half wonder at himself accompanied the former thought. Why hadn't he? He had had chances in plenty of so doing, and, after all, a pretty countenance was worth more than a passing glance, and the "points" of a girl's face might become as interesting as—well, say those of a horse's form.

But presently his study of Myra's countenance took a deeper scope, and became instinct with a higher feeling. He noticed now that even her beauty could not conceal the palpable signs of fatigue and trouble. He could interpret the far-away look in the deep blue eyes gazing wearily out into the night as holding more of heart-pain than should have entered into so young a life.

And although he felt by intuition that his fair travelling companion was a lady to the very core, he yet concluded she must be poor, for even to the dense masculine understanding the coarse garden hat the girl wore did not seem the most appropriate head-dress for a first-class carriage occupant.

The bitter east wind and the keen frosty air of the winter night penetrated even into the comfortable carriage, and partly from cold, partly from the reaction from her previous excitement, he noted that more than one strong shiver shook Miss Darrell's slender form. Therefore he affected to awake with sundry stretches of his long limbs and other evident symptoms of natural arousing.

"It is very cold," he remarked, in a deep rich voice, and smiling pleasantly; "I am sure you must suffer from it. Permit me to offer you my rug; it will at least add a little to your comfort."

"Thank you very much," responded Myra, timidly. "But I will not deprive you of—"

"Oh, don't think of that!" cried Angus, with a little affectation of brusquerie, adopted to gain her acceptance of the rug. "I am an old campaigner, I can assure you, and have often camped in the open by a bivouac fire."

He handed the rug to her, and with a shy ex-

pression of thanks Myra accepted it. Angus had meant to follow this overture by a little pleasant chat, but the girl's woe-begone face took on such a startled expression, that, with innate delicacy, the young man perceived such a course would give her pain, and therefore again subsided into his own corner and his furtive watching of her until the accumulated fatigue of a long day's travel overpowered him and Angus dropped off into real slumber, in which Myra's face was almost as vividly present as it had been to his waking vision.

The night hours passed on over the sleeper and the watcher. At last Angus Oliphant awoke with a start to find that in the dim light of a winter's morning they were passing the long monotonous rows of dingy houses which marked a London suburb. Myra, perceiving that he was awake, returned the rug with thanks.

"It is an awkward time in the morning to enter London," Mr. Oliphant remarked. "I should not be coming to the 'stony-hearted' old place at this inhospitable hour except in a case of emergency; but I have no choice."

If his desire was to entrap Myra into conversation or confidences he did not succeed, for the girl appeared as shy and reticent as she had done on the previous night. But apparently Oliphant had determined not to be so easily silenced.

"I have run up," he went on "in consequence of a telegram about the governor. He has been in a weak state for some time, and my brother thought it best to let me know of a slight change for the worse. He assured me twice that it was but slight; but I dared not linger. No one on earth ever loved me as my father has done, and my place is by his side, whatever be other worldly ties."

There was a vibration of strong though subdued emotion in his voice that thrilled Myra strangely: it recalled her own parent afresh to her mind. Oh, how different was her errand from that of this man. She fleeing from a father, he hastening to one.

"I can't put in an appearance there at this unearthly hour, however," went on Angus, in a brighter tone, "so I must drop into an early coffee-house where they know me and see about some breakfast."

Miss Darrell glanced at him hesitatingly. "Is it—is it a place to which a lady could go?" she queried.

"Assuredly. It's a well-known resort for farmers and their families from the eastern counties—half hotel, half coffee-house. If you wish to have refreshment I will take you there."

The girl thanked him as the train drew up at the long platform of the terminus. Angus Oliphant was not in the least surprised to learn that the little travelling-bag which Myra carried was her sole luggage. He had come to the conclusion that there was some mystery about her, and endeavoured with gentlest tact to prevent any embarrassment on her part.

His own portmanteau and other impedimenta were transferred to a cab, and soon he had the satisfaction of seeing that though his companion ate but little of the excellent breakfast set before them, yet the warmth and refreshment revived her wonderfully, and rendered her conspicuous loveliness still more striking.

When the meal was over, Angus rose to call a hansom for himself, speculating the while as to whether he could venture upon any word which might lead to a continuance of the chance acquaintance so happily begun. As he went out the girl desired him to also procure a four-wheeler for her.

There were no "crawlers" on the rank, and only a couple of hansoms. These Angus chartered, and returning to the hotel explained the difficulty. He noticed that Myra had dropped the heavy fall over her face which she had not done during her journey in the train.

He handed the girl into her vehicle, blaming himself meanwhile that he could not muster up the courage to ask her to permit him to call on her, and inquired what destination he should tell the driver. There was a moment of painful hesitation on Myra's part, then she said:

"Tell him to drive to St. Paul's, please." And she stretched out her little hand to Angus and thanked him warmly, while a wan, passing smile, the first he had witnessed on her countenance, brightened up her face into fresh beauty. Then as Oliphant closed the door, Myra again let fall her veil.

Mr. Oliphant stepped back to give the driver his instructions. The latter individual was a young man whose face was nearly concealed by a handkerchief wrapped around his chin and jaws as a protection against the bitter wind, and who wore a "pot" hat conspicuous alike for its glossiness and the "knowing" curl of its brim.

When Angus had told him the girl's destination, and was seeking for the fare which he had to pay, having a shrewd suspicion that his new acquaintance's purse was not too well-filled, Cobby said, suddenly:

"Well, Angy, old man, you are the fellow to forget the chums of other days and no mistake."

Angus looked up at the semi-swathed face above him sharply.

"By Jove," he said, after an instant's scrutiny, "if it isn't Frank Joynes, of Trinity. Confound it, man, what are you doing perched up there behind a cab?"

"It's a long story," was the reply, "and there's no time for telling it now. You will remember I always used to make a book on every race while I was at the university. Well, when I left the alma mater I kept up the game, and in the end so much exercise on the turf wasn't beneficial. So, with a few tenners remaining I bought this turnout, and now I'm simply Jack Boggins, the natty cabbie."

"I'm sorry for you, Frank, old man," said Angus, in a tone of genuine emotion.

"There's no need to be, Oliphant. I'm jolly enough. But I should like one day to have a chat with you over old times. Do you stay in town?"

"Yes, for some time. You'll find me at home for the next week. Look round and we'll do a weed or two and some reminiscences."

"I'll come," replied the cabbie, reaching down his hand for a hearty grip of Angus's.

Then, driving off smartly with a parting hail of "Au revoir," he left his old college friend standing thoughtfully on the kerb, musing upon the fact that he had, after all, allowed his fair travelling companion to escape without leaving him a clue, and upon the irony of fate which had transformed a promising college man into the driver of a hackney carriage.

Upon Angus Oliphant's arrival at his father's house he found that the invalid's health had taken a slight turn for the better. But Colonel Oliphant was very anxious that his son should remain with him for a while, nor was Angus at all unwilling to do so.

Besides his deep love for the afflicted parent, the young man could not resist, even against his own reason, some curious conviction that he should again meet the companion of his night journey; and the more prolonged his stay in London the greater his chance of doing so. There is little doubt that had he possessed the slightest clue to Myra's retreat, Angus Oliphant would have somehow brought about a meeting, but such an address as "St. Paul's" obviously gave him no chance of success in any search.

A week passed over when one day Angus's eye fell accidentally—if anything in human life is really the result of accident—upon an advertisement which headed the "agony" column of the "Times," and his heart gave a sudden wild bound of excitement. Thus it ran:

"MISSING.—On the night of December 3rd a young lady left her home under some misapprehension. She is about 18 years of age, rather above the middle height, with regular features, dark blue eyes, and light auburn hair. Wore when she left an olive serge dress, trimmed with tawny satin, a lady's rough ulster, and a coarse garden hat of brown plait. Probably carried a small morocco leather travelling bag. Is supposed to have taken a night train from Wrenmore on the above date. If she should see this advertisement, M. D. is entreated to return to her heart-broken father and all shall be forgotten. Anyone giving information respecting

the young lady shall be handsomely rewarded. Address, R. D., Post-office, Wenmore."

For a few moments Angus Oliphant gazed at the print in stupid amazement. Then he re-read the advertisement. Yes, there could be no doubt that the description applied to his travelling companion, and that the date corresponded to that of the nocturnal journey. Past question, it was she!

How he blamed himself now that he had not gained or preserved some trace of the fugitive—for fugitive it was clear the girl must be. At some little family bickering—for some foolish pique, she had fled from the shelter of home, and, ignorant of the world and perilously beautiful, had risked—what?

Angus Oliphant could not face, even in thought, the dread possibilities of evil which might in the few past days have crowded raven-like around the unprotected girl. And the unutterable fear which then filled his soul was a revelation to himself, for it told him with no doubtful voice that he loved this stranger, loved her passionately and enduringly.

When the young man grew more calm he sat down and wrote to R. D. His letter contained a "plain, unvarnished tale," giving full details of his meeting with the young lady whom he believed to be indicated in the advertisement, and ending with an expression of his sympathy with the advertisers.

The next afternoon as Angus was having a solitary cigar in the smoke-room, and revolving for the thousandth time all sorts of impracticable plans for the discovery of the fair unknown, a servant brought in the card of a gentleman who desired to see him. Angus glanced at it with some sudden expectation. There were two lines on the pasteboard which ran:

"ADMIRAL RICHARD DARRELL,

"Darrel Place, Wenmore."

Angus hastened down to the library. As he entered a tall man, with a clear cut aristocratic face and snowy white hair, arose hastily, and grasping young Oliphant's extended hand, ejaculated, pitifully.

"My daughter. For mercy's sake, Mr. Oliphant, tell me where my Myra is!"

Angus's face was an answer, and one to destroy all hope.

"All I know was contained in my letter to you, Mr. Darrell," was the slow response.

"Do not say so? All?"

"Yes. Would to Heaven that I had more to tell, some comfort to give you."

The grand old white head bowed down upon the broad breast.

"I am rightly served," murmured the admiral, "for my cruelty to my only child. But I have suffered—only One knows what I have endured since that night."

And tears trickled down the old man's furrowed cheeks to the heavy moustache of snowy white. Angus was silent. What right had he to offer the consolations of a stranger to a grief like this?

"But why do I speak of my sufferings," continued the admiral in a broken voice. "They are only too well deserved, for the fault is mine and mine alone. That of which I should think is the suffering of my child, alone in this cruel town, young, friendless, poor."

"Can you suggest anything in which I can assist you? I feel an interest—"

"You are very kind," said the admiral. "I can hardly thank you enough for what you have done. Dare I trespass farther on your good will?"

"Make no question of it. I will assist you in your search to the very utmost of my power and ability."

The old man expressed his thanks most warmly, but he, like Angus, was wholly without any feasible plan for pursuit of the wanderer. Again, at the admiral's request, Oliphant narrated the incidents of the journey.

The two men sat for some hours planning, conjecturing, hoping, but the ultimate result of their long consultation was that they could only place the matter in the hands of the detective,

advertising freely meanwhile in the hope that either Myra herself or someone who had recognised her should chance to read one of the notices.

The admiral left at length for his hotel, and Angus sat up far into the night revolving many impracticable schemes. He had undertaken to interview the best detectives on the morrow, to insert advertisements in every likely quarter, and to relieve the well-nigh distraught father of the task of looking after details, a duty for which he was plainly incapable.

Perhaps in this busy activity the young man hoped the horrible fears that haunted him in those quiet night hours might be at least for a time dispelled. Terrible mind pictures of Myra in peril and woe rose before Oliphant's mind through that long night, of Myra environed by dangers, of Myra hopeless and despairing, of Myra dead beneath the waters of the murky Thames, her lovely face, still and pale, looking stardward with wide open eyes from the muddy depths.

But there was plenty of work for him to do, and he threw himself into it with ardour. Tireless were his efforts, unflagging his researches. But all was in vain. Day after day passed, and even week after week, and no slightest success crowned his efforts, or those of his employes.

It seemed as if Myra Darrell had absolutely disappeared from the living, breathing world of men and woman. Everyday Angus's heart grew heavier and his duties more onerous, for as hope seemed to fail the aged admiral became more and more despondent and self-condemnatory, and it was only to Oliphant that he could turn for anything of comfort and support.

Angus was sitting alone, and sorrowful, one evening when a servant came in with a certain air of mystery.

"A—a person wishes to see you, sir."

The young man looked up with sudden interest. Perhaps it was one of the detectives whom he had employed.

"Who is it, Simpson?"

"I don't know, sir. A strange gentle—leastways a person who says his name is Joynes. When I asked him for his card he laughed and gave me this."

The "this" was a cabman's hiring ticket. Both the name and the sorry jest assured Angus that it was his quondam college friend. Oliphant could well have wished the visitor had chosen a happier time, for he himself felt so utterly uninged and miserable that the companionship even for a short time of a reckless vagabond like the ex-collegian could not be congenial to him.

But for the sake of old times hospitality must be observed, and Angus proceeded to join his visitor. He found Frank awaiting him impatiently. The cabman was well-dressed for a man of his class, everything about him, from his tightly-fitting trousers and cut-away coat to the blue bird's-eye handkerchief, with its silver horseshoe pin, having more or less of a sporting tinge, with which also his ruddy face, clean shaven chin and a pair of neat "mutton-chop" whiskers, were in thorough keeping.

He scarcely waited for the cordial handshake with which Angus greeted him to be over before he produced a week-old copy of the "Times," and pointing to a certain advertisement, asked, excitedly:

"Did you put that in, Angus?"

It was the notice of Myra's disappearance.

"Yes, yes. Do you know anything of the young lady? For Heaven's sake speak quickly!"

"I'm sorry to say that I don't know much—very little, indeed. Still, when a fellow read that advertisement out on the rank to-day—he borrowed the old paper from a public he uses to while the time away, and I can tell you it's precious dull work waiting for a fare sometimes—a thought struck me. So as I know the initials were yours, and the address that of your governor's shanty, I thought I'd run round and tell you what little I know—don't get excited—over a glass of sherry and a smoke."

Angus knew quite enough of his old acquaint-

ance to be aware that he would only tell the tale in the fashion that pleased himself, so stifling his impatience, he rang for the wine and passed his cigar-case over.

"Of course, I remember the girl very well," began Frank, when he had lighted his cigar. "And as I tooled the cab along I speculated a bit as to what your interest in her could be. Equally, of course, I could see that she was a lady, and it seemed rather a queer time in the morning to see a lady so young and—well pretty—about. But we so often drive puzzling fares that it doesn't do to worry much about them, and I daresay I should not have thought any more about this girl after that morning but for her ring."

"Her ring!" put in Angus, inquiringly.

"Yes. You remember poor Marmaduke Darrell, don't you, who was drowned when taking a header in the weeds not far from Sandford Lasher? One day when I was in his room he showed me a turquoise ring which he had been commissioned to purchase in London for a country cousin of his. It bore a peculiar heart-shaped shield set with turquoises. It was scarcely a lady's ring to my mind, and I had never seen one of the kind before."

"Well?"

"Well, the lady whom I drove to St. Paul's had that ring on her third finger. She had drawn one of her gloves off before she got out of the cab, and I could not be mistaken in the trinket."

"I have no doubt you were right, Frank. The lady was Miss Darrell—she for whom poor Marmaduke bought the ring. But I had hoped that you had more important news for me than this—that you had found some clue—"

"And who says I haven't? Not much of a one, mind. But there is more than what I have told you, and I fancy that it may be of the nature of a clue. It is for you to judge that, and if needs be, act upon it."

"Go on; go on!" cried Oliphant, impatiently.

But Frank evidently enjoyed telling his story, and was not to be hurried. Deliberately he tilted the white ash from the end of his cigar, and with equal deliberation carried the wine-glass to his lips. These preliminaries over he recommenced.

"The day before yesterday I was soundly hard up. Generally I do pretty well, for mine is a good turnout, and a tidy nag between the shafts, and my fares are mostly swell fellows—some of whom have known me when I was one too. It was only by accident that you found me on a 'night' cab. Well, I'd been cleaned out at billiards and had to take my watch to my 'uncle's.' That old chronometer—it's the same one that I had at Trinity—has been awfully useful to me. It not only goes itself but it keeps me going—twice the joke? As I stood waiting for the pawnbroker I found that the party in the next compartment had a very soft and sweet voice—it was a woman's voice, and was asking timidly for a loan larger than the man would give. I was so taken with her voice that I craned over my neck a bit to see her but couldn't."

"Frank, is there any need to give all these particulars?"

"You let me tell my tale in my own fashion, Angus, lad," laughed the cabman. "It's bad manners to interrupt, as my sister's governess used to tell me when I was a small boy."

"I can assure you they are real," faltered the girl, "and it cost twenty guineas."

"I can assure you they are false, my good woman," retorted the pert counter skipper. "Good design, but paste and electro-plate. Ten shillings—not a farthing more."

"The woman murmured some words inaudible to me, and having received the half sovereign, left the place. As the fellow came towards me I saw that he held a ring which I recognised instantly."

"I know that ring," said I.

"Do you?" he replied, sneeringly.

"Yes, and it is worth all the lady said that it was."

"The lady, my man? Who are you talking about?"

"The lady who brought the ring."

"'Twasn't no lady. 'Twas a sly-looking imp of a boy, who hid his face with his collar. I suspect he stole it."

"I dashed to the door, and by the lamplight saw a slender figure in male attire just disappearing round a distant corner. I returned and completed my own little arrangement, speculating much what could induce your lady friend—for I can swear that the voice was hers—to masquerade in that fashion. When my pal read that advertisement, some light broke on me. Oho, I said, a mystery in the case then, a runaway ward, and all that sort of thing. Well, I'll go and look up Angus Oliphant. I have done so, and that's my story."

The expression of many conflicting emotions had passed over the listener's face during Frank's recital—hope, fear, pity, annoyance, ending with something like despair.

"Poor darling!" he murmured; "to what straits is she not reduced in her extremities?"

Then aloud:

"You have done me a great service, Frank. You are the first who has brought us a word of intelligence, and Admiral Darrell will not be slow to reward you."

"Tush! I want no reward for such a trifle. I hope it will be of use to you."

"I fear not. You spoke of a clue, but you appear to have none."

"I said 'perhaps there was.' It all depends upon whether Miss Darrell gave a true or false address. It would have been useless for me to push inquiry, for they would not have given the address to a man like me. But to the lady's father—or, better still, a detective officer—they might do so."

"Thanks, Frank; you give me comfort. We will follow your suggestion."

Early the next day Angus, the admiral—who caught eagerly at the gleam of hope—and a detective made their way to the pawnbroker's shop mentioned by Frank Joynes. It was in Pimlico. The principal of the establishment placed no difficulties in their way. First he showed them the ring—which the old man wept over and kissed as having so lately been in his daughter's hands—then he furnished them with the address which Myra had given, which was in a small street in the vicinity. The little party lost no time in proceeding to the spot indicated. The neighbourhood was respectable, but it was evidently a respectable poverty. As the detective gave a resounding knock he remarked:

"I suppose you leave me to put all inquiries and so on, gentlemen?"

Angus looked at the admiral quickly; although he had told the old man that probably Myra had assumed male attire, he had not thought it necessary to confide that part of her escapade to the detective, nor had it transpired during their recent researches. Oliphant interpreted aright the look of intelligence which the old admiral flashed across to him.

"Thanks, I think I can manage here, Raines. It's all straightforward question and answer. And now I think of it this is a corner house and has a side door in the next street. I wish you would step round and keep your eye on that."

Just as Angus effected this diversion the door opened and the landlady appeared.

"Is Mr. Byles at home?" queried the young man, using the name which Myra had apparently adopted.

The woman glanced at him keenly, then at his companion.

"You are friends of his, sir?" she queried in place of replying.

"Yes. Is he within?"

"No, sir. Oh, why did you not come sooner?" and the woman gave an hysterical sob.

"What do you mean?" cried Angus, in sudden terror. "Is—he ill?"

"Yes, poor boy. I am afraid he is! But he's left here, sir, left this morning."

"Left! Where has he gone?"

"I don't know."

"You say that he is ill—do you know why he left under such circumstances?"

The woman hesitated, her face betrayed considerable agitation, and she drew back a step or two into the passage. Angus followed her in, and the admiral, trembling in excitement, leaned against the door for support.

"I ask you, do you know why he left?" repeated Oliphant, in a raised tone.

"Who the deuce are you, coming here like an inquisitor?" demanded a harsh voice from the back of the passage; and a stout, vulgar-looking man in his shirt sleeves staggered forward. "So yer wants to know why that young swindler left? Well, I'll tell ye. 'Cos he couldn't pay his way; 'cos he owed a week's rent and hadn't got a rap, and I won't agoin' to have him die here, and—"

White to the very lips with passion, and regardless of consequences Angus Oliphant advanced towards the insolent speaker with the intention of striking him to the ground, when a heavy fall behind him arrested his attention, and turning he saw the admirably lying insensible on the steps.

"Raines!" cried Angus, loudly, and sprang to the old man's side.

Meanwhile we must return to Myra Darrell upon her parting with Angus Oliphant. Her misery of spirit during the long train journey had been great. After the first excitement of action which her flight necessitated came a depression alike of body and mind, almost amounting to prostration.

And though the girl's resolution to continue her course remained unchanged, yet the thought of how this blow might affect her father began to haunt her. She put it from her by a strong effort. Surely, she told herself, he had not of late loved her, or why should his conduct have been so harsh and cruel? Yet, again and again an indefinite fear of the consequences of her deed crept back into the girl's mind and would not be banished.

Arrived in London the necessity of action aroused Myra in part from her depression. She was so impressed by the frank and kindly manner of Angus Oliphant towards her, that more than once came the desire to confide, in part, at least, to him and seek his counsel and advice.

For Myra felt herself utterly unfortified either by character or training for the struggle with this new strange world into which she was about to plunge herself. How was she—a timid, simple child, fresh from the home circle—to encounter the rebuffs and hardships to which Myra foresaw that she would be exposed; and how to escape the search which she believed her father would institute immediately her flight became known. These questions must be faced, and the latter especially required an immediate solution.

There was yet another, which, in her inexperience, troubled Myra least—how was she to live? This matter she had, at least, settled to her own satisfaction. She was a more than respectable painter in water-colours. Often had she seen exposed for sale in the windows of the London picture-dealers sketches much inferior to many of her own which adorned the walls of Darrell Place.

As the cab rattled along the girl began to formulate her plans. Her first desire was to avoid any chance of discovery by her father, whom she believed to have both the power and will in such a case to reclaim her by force. While pondering this matter her eye fell upon a very youthful sailor in full man-o'-war rig walking along the pavement with the careless swing of his craft.

The extremely juvenile appearance of the seaman recalled to Myra's mind stories which she had read of women who had personated the sterner sex, and followed the fortunes of the sea for years.

She hailed the new idea of concealment with gladness. At home when she had masqueraded in the medieval male costume of page or courtier in private theatricals or acting charades all had agreed in complimenting her on the excellence

of her make-up and bearing. Surely it would not be immodest or unwomanly if she now adopted a modern garb of the same character in order to render the battle of life easier for her, and safety from her father and Stephen Piers more certain.

She alighted in St. Paul's Churchyard, and was a little discomfited to discover that her late travelling companion had settled with her driver; but, later on, she decided that as her finances were scanty the former had done her a very real kindness which she need not scruple to accept at his hands under her peculiar circumstances. Myra had now settled her plan, one which she thought would throw any pursuer off the trail.

She knew a little of western and south-western London, and thither she made her way. Engaging a bed at a respectable hotel for the night, the girl sallied forth again and purchased at a cheap clothier's a complete suit of clothes, linen, hat, &c., for a young man of about her own height, also needles, thread, scissors, &c.

Directing them to be packed and that she would call for them, Myra passed the remainder of the day in a round of the picture shop windows, to estimate, if possible, her chances of success. She thought they were good, being fully aware that she could surpass many of the water-colour drawings which she saw priced at very respectable sums.

Several times during the day Myra was conscious of a singular feeling of lassitude and discomfort altogether unknown to her before. It was nothing, she told herself—depression of spirits, bodily weariness, or the influence of the heavier London atmosphere, so unlike the sharp buoyant air of Wenmere. But, reason as she might, the girl could not shake off the unpleasant sensation.

That night but little sleep visited the girl's weary eyes. No sooner was she locked in her bedroom than she took out her new purchases. What a strange experience was the fitting them on. As Myra caught a glance of her face in the small mirror upon the toilette table, she beheld it covered with burning blushes.

Ah, this was something very different to dressing up at home as a page, say of the days of Louis Quatorze. That was merely playing a part, and everybody present knew the fact. But this was the first great step in a life of deception.

Would she henceforth for ever have to live such a life? Could she dare thus to risk putting herself voluntarily outside the pale of all she loved and revered? Yes. There was no choice for her. Anything, death itself, before a life-union with a man whose glance was torture to her and whose caress pollution.

The garments needed little alteration, and that Myra was needlewoman enough to make. A more difficult task was before her. The girl let down her grand profusion of sunny locks, and seating herself before the little looking-glass commenced to shear them off to what she considered masculine brevity. It was an extremely awkward business, as Myra found, and occupied her for a long time.

At length the task was satisfactorily accomplished and the girl then proceeded to gather up and burn the heap of brown-gold hair which lay upon the floor. Some curious instinct led her to suddenly hold back one long tress from the flames, and wrapping it in paper, place it in her bosom.

"One day, perhaps, papa may care to have it," she told herself.

Next morning, before anyone save the hotel porter was stirring, the girl, attired in her new garb, and carrying her feminine belongings wrapped up in a parcel, left the hotel. That day she took a small furnished room in a quiet little street and paid a week's rent in lieu of giving a reference and purchased Bristol board, colours and camel's hair pencils.

All this day too the same feeling of dull oppression hung over her. She fought against it bravely, saying that a good night's rest would restore her, but none the less it brought something like a vague dread.

But a very real fear came from the fact, which

Myra discovered on looking at her purse before retiring to rest, namely, that her purchases had exhausted her finances, with the exception of a few shillings. This was rather a startling discovery.

That night Myra's anticipations of a sound slumber which should "ravel up the sleeve of care," and make her strong for her world fight, were not realised. The girl could not sleep, save in fitful disturbed snatches. Her head was hot, her hands clammy, her tongue parched. Were these the effects of fatigue? Decidedly she had never experienced such sensations before.

The physical inconvenience did not fail to react upon the girl's mind also. Hope appeared to flee her pillow during those long night watches, and accusing conscience taunted her as perhaps the murderer of her parent. How joyfully she greeted the pale light of the late winter's morn.

She set about her work in earnest, although she found her hand curiously unsteady and her imagination not so alert as of old. When the picture was completed Myra was by no means satisfied with it, she had done far better than that. The second was more satisfactory. Still to the girl it appeared that her hand had lost somewhat of its wonted cunning. On the fourth day of her sojourn at her new home, having completed several drawings, Myra placed them in a portfolio which she had procured and started off upon a round of calls on shops likely to purchase them.

Poor girl, she had much to learn! She was received in widely different manners. Some dealers were polite, some churlish. There were those who would not purchase of a stranger, and those who had no scruple on that score. But on two points all agreed, that never had the market for such wares been so overstocked and never had their value been so low.

The prices offered to Myra did not much more than cover the cost of materials. Yet the girl struggled on bravely. It did not take much to barely live, she thought, and had her health sustained her spirit the purpose of independence would have been achieved, perhaps, in the end. But it was not to be.

Day by day her weakness increased, and soon her only means of purchasing bread and paying for her humble home lay in obtaining advances on her clothes and trinkets. The landlady of the house was kind to the sickly youth, as she supposed Myra to be; but her husband, a man of grasping character and brutal demeanour, was dreaded by the lodgers.

When Angus Oliphant flew to the assistance of Admiral Darrell, and raised the old man from the ground, the deathly pallor of the veteran's face, and the rigidity of his form, awakened in the youth's mind a terrible fear that Myra's father had succumbed to the shock of the evil tidings which he had just heard.

Raines, more experienced, reassured Angus. He burst open the old man's vest, and placing his hand upon the admiral's breast proclaimed that the heart still beat. The insolent ruffian who had blurted out the ominous news which had done the mischief disappeared from the scene, but his wife came forward with a vessel of water in her trembling hand and proffered her good offices.

They lavied the rugged brow, and forced a little brandy between the pale lips, and had soon the satisfaction of perceiving signs of returning animation. Then Raines procured a cab, and the half-conscious man was taken to Colonel Oliphant's house and tenderly cared for. He lay for hours with closed eyes, murmuring, piteously:

"My child—my Myra, I have slain her. Oh, wretched father!"

And for hours, too, Angus watched beside him with the loving care of a son, his own heart racked with fearful apprehensions. But as morning waned to afternoon he could bear this enforced inaction no longer. He felt that should he continue to sit there, a prey to agonised terrors, he should go mad.

So, leaving the old man to Miss Oliphant's kindly tendance, Angus started Fimlico-ward with some wild hope of finding Myra possessing his brain.

A favourite and intelligent colley dog of his father's, who was a prime favourite of the young man, mutely solicited permission to accompany Angus as he took his hat from the stand in the hall. He did not repulse the animal, who taking his silence for a tacit consent, followed gravely down the steps and along the streets as if sobered by his young master's mood.

What miles those twain, the man and the dog, tramped through the half-melted snow and grimy slush of those Fimlico streets that afternoon. At last, about a quarter of an hour before the time of closing, Angus found himself opposite the entrance to St. James's Park. It suddenly occurred to him that he would call upon Raines, the detective, who lived in Parliament Street, and that he would cross the park as the shortest way.

The enclosure was empty, and the almost untrodden snow lay pure and white, its surface receiving momentarily fresh additions from a fall of heavy flakes which had been descending for the past hour. In the street Sancho had had kept well at heel, but here in the open he ventured to precede his master; his manner was demure and thoughtful, and he made none of those wild rushes into the snow in which the animal often delights.

The calm of his manner was broken with startling suddenness. He bounded off far to the right, and halting suddenly, threw his tawny muzzle skyward and howled piteously.

Despite Angus's preoccupation of mind he could not choose but notice the act, which, however, he attributed to caprice, and called Sancho sharply to him. The animal refused to budge from the spot where he stood, but gave vent to another longer and more lugubrious howl. Actuated by some sudden impulse, Oliphant walked quickly to the place.

The dog was standing beside what appeared to be a little long hillock of snow. As he saw the young man approach he began to scratch at it frantically, sending a shower of white particles to the right and left, and exposing some dark surface beneath.

Thoroughly aroused now Angus sprang to his side. The object was a prostrate human form lying by one of the seats, and covered with a light coating of snow. With a strange sinking of the heart Angus dropped on his knee and raised the head.

Closed eyelids, drawn mouth, pinched features, hue wan as the snow around, but—Myra Darrell!

That face—living or dead—he could never forget. Was she living, or had her spirit fled? As he raised the still figure the first stroke of the hour for closing the park rang out from the Houses of Parliament.

There was not a moment to lose. Angus lifted the light form as if it had been a feather, and plunged madly forward. When he had cleared the park, he glanced around anxiously for the coloured lamp of a surgery. One was at hand. With another impetuous rush he gained it, and the next moment had consigned his precious burden to the care of the doctor.

For a long time the efforts of science to resuscitate the wanderer were futile. Myra Darrell had reached the border of the spirit realm more nearly than had her sire a few hours earlier that day.

But youth asserted itself, and by slow degrees life was wooed back once again, and when at length the white lips arose from over the deep blue eyes, Myra saw, through a dim haze, the face of her human preserver bending in loving anxiety over her, and, in the access of a grand calm and sense of safety, closed them again on glad tears, to send up from the depths of her soul a prayer of thanksgiving to the merciful Heaven that had succoured her in her dire necessity.

Both Admiral Darrell and Colonel Oliphant were present at a certain wedding which took

place not many months later. Mrs. Darrell refused to honour the ceremony with her presence, but both Myra and Angus bore her absence with great fortitude.

Angus however insisted that Frank Joyney should be his "best man," and that worthy managed to put off his horsiness for the day.

Had Myra had her will she would have imitated our ancestors who took their dogs to church with them, and insisted upon Sancho forming one of the bridal party, but she had to yield to conventionality on that point.

W. J. E. C.

VIOLA HARCOURT.

(Continued from page 37.)

"This intrusion on our privacy is unwarrantable!" cried Sandford, "and I have a good mind to kick you out, sir!"

"Better not!" exclaimed the intruder. "Violence is always objectionable. Excuse the card. I haven't one with me. I am a lawyer; name of Snap; address, the Fields, Lincoln's Inn. I come on behalf of Lord Turlington."

"I wish you had come at a less objectionable time, because we can't talk now."

"No time like the present," said Mr. Snap. "The whole thing lies in a nutshell. What we want is possession. If you go out at once we will refrain from taking legal proceedings. If you want to fight, I have warrants for the apprehension of all four of you on a charge of conspiracy. Don't get in a passion, my dear sir. Keep cool; be calm; consider the situation."

"But the whole thing is a piece of monstrous injustice," replied Sandford, "and as the friend of Miss Harcourt Sutton, now Mrs. Conyers, I must protest."

"No use, I assure you, no use at all. We have the confession signed in the presence of Mr. Smyley—highly respectable man Smyley. No going against him, you know. Now what are you going to do?"

Sandford felt inclined to take him by the neck and throw him out of the window, but Viola seeing his anger in his eyes rose from the table and placed her hand gently on his arm.

"We will go," she said, quietly.

"Then you give up everything without a struggle," answered Sandford.

"It is Herbert's wish and mine too."

"All right; there is an end of it."

Sandford put his hands in his pockets and glared at Mr. Snap, who fixed his eyes upon the good things displayed on the table.

"Travelling makes one hungry," he remarked.

"Nice spread. Looks good. Very sensible young lady that. I'll make myself at home. Don't trouble to carve for me. What is this? Turkey, lobster salad. Humph! Turkey first and salad afterwards. Don't mind me. Go on with your amusement. I'm not in a hurry for the keys."

Saying this Mr. Snap drew a chair up to the table and began to make a hearty meal, and while he was thus engaged Viola led Herbert from the room, Sandford following with Lucy.

"Humph!" said the lawyer. "Stupid people. Spoilt their appetite, I suppose. No matter. Capital wine this. Know how to live."

And he went on with his lunch as perfectly unconcerned as if he had been bidden to the banquet.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN DISTRESS.

The blow which had fallen upon Mr. and Mrs. Conyers was none the less severe because it was expected. They knew that it would not be long before Lord Turlington would take those steps which the confession enabled him to. Yet it was hard to give up all the luxury to which they had been used. Viola did not feel so much for herself as she did for Herbert, and all his regret was for her.

Lucy and Viola, woman-like, mingled their tears together, while Sandford Newton endeavoured to comfort and inspire them with courage. He argued that a crime, such as Madam Menzies and Miss Agnew had practised, must be exposed in time, and that his lordship would not long enjoy Tarlington Chase.

He meant to devote all his time and energy to discovering the two women from whose fears he hoped to be able to wring an acknowledgment of the great wrong they had done to an innocent girl, who was the victim of their cunning and cruelty.

Cheering as this view of the case was, it did not raise either Herbert's or Viola's spirits, for even if his detective skill was successful, a long time would necessarily have to elapse before he unravelled the tangled skein.

Poverty, hopeless and crushing, satred them in the face, for they had no money and no prospect of getting any, while they were absolutely destitute of any place to go to. Only the day before Viola had, acting on Sandford's advice, sent a cheque to the bank which the manager refused to cash, as Lord Tarlington had laid an embargo on her deposit account.

It was clear that Mr. Snap would only allow them to take away ordinary articles of wearing apparel, and that everything of value would have to be left behind. Sandford, too, was very much crippled in his resources and could not render them any pecuniary assistance, so that the outlook was as black as it could be.

When Mr. Snap had finished his lunch, he rang the bell, ordered up the servants and told them in a brief speech what had happened and that he had taken formal possession of the Hall in the name of its rightful owner, Lord Tarlington.

This news caused the utmost consternation among the domestics, but when they heard further that they would not be discharged they did not seem to care so much, though general sympathy was expressed for Viola, who had been a kind and considerate mistress.

There was one among them who had received several favours at Viola's hands. He was a gamekeeper, named Wyman, living in a small cottage on the confines of the estate. During a walk Viola had come across his home and rested there.

Everything was very neat and comfortable, but, to her surprise, Mrs. Wyman and her daughter, a girl of fifteen, were in tears. She was soon informed of the cause. Wyman had become security to the amount of thirty pounds for a friend. Neither of them could pay the money, and the brokers were coming that day to break up the home and take all the furniture, which they had been years in accumulating.

Without a moment's hesitation, Viola, in the generosity of her heart, paid the money and made the Wyman's her friends for life. She had forgotten all about it. Not so the honest gamekeeper, who happened to be in the servants' hall when the intelligence of Mr. Snap's arrival and errand was made known.

Wyman was very indignant when he heard the story. He declared that he did not believe a word of it, and that it was a base plot got up to ruin his young lady. His gratitude made him bold.

Taking his hat in his hand he went upstairs to the drawing-room where Viola, Herbert, and Lucy were sitting, resembling pictures of despair. Sandford had gone to confer with Mr. Snap and ask him if he would make any present or allowance to Viola if she gave immediate possession, of course always under protest, so as not to create any prejudice or bar to future legal proceedings. Wyman knocked at the door and was told to come in. He was a fine-looking, well-made man of forty, with a fine open expression of countenance.

"I ask your pardon, miss," he exclaimed, "for intruding on you at such a time, but I hear you are in trouble and have to quit the Hall."

"That is so, Wyman, I am sorry to say," replied Viola. "But we must be brave and try to face our misfortune. I have powerful enemies, and for the time they have triumphed."

"You'll have the prayers of me and mine,"

continued Wyman; "that however is not what I came to say. If so be that you would like to come and lodge at our house, we have a room at your disposal. My place is small, but humble, yet it is clean and you'll have a hearty welcome. I shan't forget the one that saved our home, nor my missis either. It shan't cost you a penny, that I'll answer for, and perhaps it isn't convenient for you to go up to a big city like Lunnon all in a hurry."

Viola's eyes filled with tears at this proof of the man's good nature. The offer was peculiarly acceptable at the time, and she could see Herbert breathe a sigh of relief, as if one great difficulty was taken off his mind. While she was hesitating as to what answer she should make, Sandford re-entered the room looking flushed and angry.

"Well," exclaimed Viola, "how did you succeed with the representative of the law? Did the consumption of our lunch render him more amiable or civilized?"

"Not in the least," answered Sandford Newton. "I never saw such a fellow; he has no more heart than a stone. He won't give you a penny, and he says if we don't clear out with bag and baggage directly he'll get the sheriff's officers and make us go. What to do I don't know, for I have only money enough until I go to my office to take Lucy and myself up to town."

"Thanks to this good man," said Viola, with a smile, "the Gordian knot has been cut and we are released from our difficulty."

"How?" ejaculated Sandford, in astonishment.

"He has offered Herbert and myself food and shelter in his cottage until the storm blows over. I am an adept at dressmaking, as you know, and in a day or two I will go back to my old trade. I know I can get work in the town where I used to buy things. I will take it home and talk to my husband while I am engaged."

Herbert raised his sightless eyes as if he wished to gaze upon his dutiful and noble wife who cheerfully made such sacrifices for him.

"Excellent," cried Sandford. "There might be a worse way out of the trouble than that. It extricates us from our dilemma, and I, for one, tender my thanks to the gentleman."

"I'm no gentleman, sir," replied Wyman, laughing, "and don't profess to be. I'm only a gamekeeper on the estate. The lady did me a kindness once, which I shall never forget, and I want to return it."

"Ah! I see. Very right and proper, indeed. 'Throw your bread upon the waters and it shall return to you after many days.' It's the case of the mouse gnawing the net in which the lion was caught. Now all is plain sailing. I only wish I might throw that lawyer Snap out of the window. I should go away quite happy then."

"No violence, Sandford," exclaimed Viola. "Remember what you promised me."

"Don't be afraid, I'm calm now. Get your things together, ladies; we are allowed to have the carriage to take us where we want to go."

Wyman made a bow.

"I'll hasten home," he said, "and prepare for your coming, and that of your good husband, Mrs. Conyers. It's rather a sad wedding-day for you, but we'll hope that the clouds will break soon and the sun shine out again."

They thanked him for his kind sentiment, and when he was gone the ladies packed up their things, the boxes being taken to the carriage. Mr. Snap had the good sense—not to say the decency—to stay in the drawing-room, as his presence at such a time would have been offensive and insulting.

It is true that he was only the agent of another, but there are things that make a man ashamed of himself, and if Mr. Snap had any shame in his composition, which is extremely doubtful, he must have felt it at that moment.

The servants had all collected in the hall; several of the women held their aprons to their eyes, and the housemaid cried outright, while Viola's maid sobbed audibly.

Sandford Newton and Lucy went first, the footman holding the door open as respectfully as if Viola was still his mistress. Then came Viola with Herbert leaning on her arm, looking handsome and every inch a gentleman, only betraying his calamity by the hesitating way in which he stepped. As they neared the front door the butler stepped forward and said:

"If you please, ma'am, the other servants wish me to remark, and I join in myself, that we're very sorry indeed you're going, for we never want to have a better mistress, and we wish you and Mr. Conyers every happiness."

This little speech touched Viola very much. It was some slight consolation to her in the hour of her affliction to know that these simple people like her, and regretted that she was compelled to leave the Hall, which she had for some time considered her own.

"Thank you," she answered, in her sweet, low voice. "I have nothing to give you but my thanks, and believe me those come from my heart. Maybe I shall not always be poor. I am the victim of a wicked plot; all may come clear some day. I will say no more at present, except to wish you good-bye; and I sincerely trust that when I come back here, with my character unstained, I shall meet you all once more. Farewell."

The butler raised her hand, and as they descended the steps Viola and Herbert were greeted with three ringing cheers, amidst which they got into the carriage; but the females had determined that they should not go away without the customary ovation, so they drove off in a shower of rice and old slippers, which is supposed to bring good luck to a newly-married couple. Mr. Snap heard the noise and came out looking angry.

"What's the meaning of this disturbance?" he cried. "Go below all of you or I'll report your conduct to Lord Tarlington. I'm the master here now."

The servants dispersed murmuring among themselves; and meanwhile the carriage drove to Wyman's cottage, where the parlours, consisting of a sitting and bedroom, were being specially prepared for their new tenants, everything being nearly completed as they arrived.

Mr. and Mrs. Newton wished them adieu here. Sandford promised that he would do all that he could for Viola, and said he would write frequently. The parting was an affecting one. Lucy regretted leaving her old friend, but it had to be done, and when the wedded pair alighted the carriage proceeded on its way to the railway station.

Mrs. Wyman and her daughter received the new-comers with respect, and ushered them into the cosy parlour, saying that supper would be ready in an hour, and that if they required anything they were to ring a handbell which stood on the table.

When Viola was alone with Herbert she felt inclined to cry, the change in her condition and prospects had been so very sudden, but fearing she would depress Herbert, she refrained from indulging in grief.

"Do you think you will be comfortable here, my own?" Herbert asked. "I cannot see if the surroundings are all that you could wish."

"Why, of course. Is not this the realisation of every romantic girl's wish? Love in a cottage, dearest, is charming, and I am sure I do not regret the loss of the Hall a bit, if you don't."

"But I am so helpless, love, and shall be such a drag upon you."

"Do not say that. I accepted you for better or worse until death do us part, and you will never hear me utter one sigh of regret. I am the happiest little woman in the world to-day."

"I believe it, Vi. Heaven bless you for saying it. I, too, feel happy. Sit near me. I should like to hold your hand in mine."

She took a seat by his side, and secure in each other's affection, they realised their happiness fully. Lord Tarlington could take away rank, money, houses, land, but he could not rob them of their mutual love.

(To be Continued.)



[DELICATE ATTENTIONS.]

AN UNROMANTIC MARRIAGE.

"ALL alone?"

"Yes. Mamma has a headache."

"And so has Annie. Shall we condole with each other?"

Colonel Selden seated himself facing Maggie Stuart without more ado. The breakfast parlour was furnished with small tables, of which the Seldens, husband and wife, occupied one, and the Stuarts, mother and daughter, occupied another. Maggie herself was as fresh and bonny as every woman ought to be when presiding at a breakfast-table. She wore a white flannel dress; her brown hair was plaited low in her neck, and filleted with narrow blue ribbon across the top of her head. Colonel Selden had a sentimental masculine weakness for white and light blue. She hence pleased his eye.

"Annie a headache? I am sorry for that?"

"So am I. But when hasn't Annie a headache? Good health is the exception, not the rule, with her. I make a wretched nurse."

"I am a born nurse; you are a heartless egotist," laughed Maggie, shaking her pretty head at him.

"That's right. Call me names as much as you please if you only will give me a cup of coffee. What nice flowers," he went on. "Who gave them to you? Can't you spare me just one

rosebud for my buttonhole, to console me for not being a fascinating young lady?"

Maggie gave it to him.

"Aren't you going to eat your own breakfast?"

"I am not sure. I must get mamma's ready first. Here comes her toast."

She proceeded to butter the toast and to arrange the tea and toast on the tray, which was forthwith despatched to Mrs. Stuart's room. Meanwhile her breakfast was cold; Colonel Selden ordered her another. She had picked up the morning paper, and was reading an account of a ball where she had been the night before.

"They say I looked like Hebe," she said, laying down the paper. "But they made a mistake about my dress. They say it was pink; it was white. Provoking, isn't it?"

"Exceedingly. Your chop will be as cold as a stone."

"I believe I am not very hungry."

She broke off a bit of toast and nibbled that, then drank a mouthful of tea, then pushed the cup back. How was he to guess that she was guilty of the girlish folly of eating between times, and that between this and lunch she would probably make large inroads into a box of French candy one of her admirers had sent her the day before? The fashion she had of pecking at her food was one of Maggie's charms for Colonel Selden. It imparted a certain ethereal character to her. He was of Lord

Byron's opinion that a woman should never be seen eating.

"Why didn't you and Annie go last night?"

"Annie was used up, as usual. I would have gone by myself, for the pleasure of having a waltz with you, but I concluded your card would be full, and that you would not have a word to spare for a miserable married man."

"Oh, I don't know. I like married men. I prefer them to single men. They are nicer. I wonder why?"

"The elevating influence of the gentler sex, it may be. You will have to run a certain risk, of course, but I daresay the man you marry will come out of the matrimonial mill in a year or two greatly improved. Who is it to be?"

"No one just yet. I don't believe in matrimony much. So few married people are happy."

As she spoke she thought distinctly of Colonel and Mrs. Selden. The same idea presented itself to her companion's mind.

"You are right," he said. "Few marriages are happy. People make grave mistakes. We marry in haste."

Maggie looked up and caught his eye. It told her what he had never put into words, although it was an open secret that Mrs. Selden's ill health and fault-finding and cold disposition made her anything but the companion one would fancy to be after the heart of a gay, popular, brilliant man like Colonel Selden.

"Yes, grave mistakes," he repeated. "And the mischief of it is that one can't get away from the effects of a mistake once made. What a fine thing if one could only begin over again every day. Life is uphill work, at best." Then, suddenly: "Would you like to take a ride with me this morning?"

"Oh, wouldn't I?" She sprang to her feet, and they left the room laughing and talking. Two ladies passed them.

"What a pity Colonel Selden did not marry a woman of that kind," one said to the other.

"He looks like a different man when he is talking to Maggie Stuart. He loses all that indifferent, nonchalant air."

"Every one blossoms forth who talks to Maggie," the other said. "What is it about her? Is it magnetism?"

"Account for the unexplained by the unexplained, by all means," laughed the other.

Maggie donned her habit, kissed her mother good-bye, scudded downstairs, to be helped into her saddle by Colonel Selden, preparatory to a canter out into the breezy open country. Maggie was in infectious high spirits; her companion caught their contagion. He felt ten years younger as they rode along. He was called a charming man, with that readiness and brilliancy which are sure to be popular in society. He was at as great pains to be agreeable to this one little girl to-day as he had ever been to entertain a roomful. His efforts were rewarded with Miss Stuart's brightest smiles. She clapped her hands enthusiastically once as she exclaimed:

"Oh, how clever you are—so much cleverer than anyone else I know!"

"Oh, but what do you care for cleverness, even granting that I am clever? What pleases you is good dancing, and hair parted down the middle, and nice-fitting gloves."

"Don't you dance?"

"Not professionally. Also, I suppose I could part my hair down the middle on an emergency."

"I wish you would. I like a man to have the look of an exquisite about him. Then if he is clever besides, one is all the more surprised and pleased. Oh, what a lovely stretch of road! Shall we gallop? Wasn't that lovely? Aren't we having a good time?"

Charles Selden carried the memory of that good time into many rather dismal days that followed. This was the tenor of his life, as near as might be: Breakfast; office until four; home to find his wife dressing for a series of visits on which she demanded his attendance—visiting was the Moloch before whose shrine Mrs. Selden sacrificed during the gay season; dinner; a long, dull evening, when Annie would lie stretched on the sofa, overcome by fatigue and nerves and other disagreeable things. If her husband left

her she was sure to make life hideous for him on the following day; if he remained with her, he felt as though his senses were deserting him, and he lapsing into a condition of idiocy. She had a talent for fault-finding, and she devoted these dreadful evenings to a discussion of her wrongs, real and imaginary.

It was little wonder that a glimpse of Maggie Stuart's bright face, the sound of her fresh young voice, should put fresh heart and courage into the man who had, alas! become strangely infatuated with this girl who should have been absolutely nothing to him. There is no defining the laws of attraction. The saddest part of all is, that where we are most strongly attracted there do we not always belong by the laws of destiny.

Certainly Maggie's thoughts of Colonel Selden, if pleasant, were of the briefest in those days. She was a very gay girl then. Her mother positively exhausted her health and strength in keeping Maggie in the very centre of the vortex of party-going and theatre-going, of dressing and visiting. She was a martyr to the cause of society. "We can't afford to refuse this invitation," she would say. "One is forgotten so directly. It is so easy to fall out of line. No, no. If one goes into society at all one must go everywhere. We can go to some quiet place next summer and rest."

But by spring Mrs. Stuart broke down. She was attacked by a low, nervous fever, the result of fatigue and exhaustion. Maggie was the most faithful and devoted nurse. She wrote regrets to this place and to that. She put away all her little adornments, and clad herself in a nunlike simplicity. She appeared to have no thought or wish beyond the sick-room, where she watched her mother day and night.

The gay people she had been thrown with lately gave her withdrawal from them a very brief consideration. You all know how that is. Gay people have no time to look up those who drop out of line. Maggie's youth and beauty had been in her favour, too. Her fresh face and fresh toilets had served to brighten the ball-rooms to which she had been bidden. Youth and beauty have special claims to consideration of their own.

Maggie had realised her position on the outskirts of society. She was scarcely snubbed now. She smiled a little to herself at first; but it was not hard to forgive the snubbers; it was always in her mind that the world was full of a great deal nicer people than any of these.

The world was inhabited, for her, with the shining possibilities of youth. Moreover, she was engrossed in taking care of her mother. She had no time for anyone who did not share this feeling.

It was because Colonel Selden did, or professed to, that she took greater comfort in his society than in that of anyone else. He made a study of thoughtfulness and sympathy, or rather he was so interested in the mother's sickness, for the daughter's sake, that it occurred to him to do a hundred little things to brighten Maggie's life and lighten her labours. Was he not her best friend?

Wasn't he a great deal kinder than anyone else had been in this time of trial. He marvelled at her unflagging brightness and spirit and courage. She was a revelation to him of unselfish, cheerful womanhood. She put a cordial into his life such as it had never known since the days when he had had day dreams of love and goodness, and had invested with ideal perfections the first pretty woman he had been thrown with. Maggie revived his waning faith and hope.

These conversations took place, as often as not, under Mrs. Selden's eyes. Once or twice she did say:

"How odd it is that you let your coffee get cold!"

But, take it all in all, she did not believe that it mattered much to anyone but herself whether they had their coffee hot or cold. Whereas to her this was a subject of vital importance.

Gradually Maggie and Colonel Selden came to depend upon these daily talks. If he failed to

be in the dining-room when she was there Maggie's head would ache with nervousness and her heart would beat ridiculously. Poor Maggie! She had not her feelings under good control.

She was an odd, straightforward little thing, even when arguing all to herself. She taxed herself with caring too much for Colonel Selden; but she forthwith scouted the idea. She assured herself that there was not a particle of sentiment in her feelings for him.

Mr. Stuart had gone to America on business, to be gone six months. His wife had refused to send for him or to tell him of her illness, as Maggie had wished to do.

"What good would it do?" Mrs. Stuart persisted. "I should probably be well again by the time he got here." She did not add, "And in the meanwhile we should lose thousands;" but she thought it.

However, she preferred to run the risk of dying away from her husband to that of having less money to spend next year—should she live. To do her justice, she thought less of her husband and herself than of Maggie. Her whole soul was bound up in Maggie's future.

She had married for love herself, and she had married somewhat out of the circle in which she had been born. If aspirations that are purely worldly may still be called aspirations, she cherished those of the most decided character, for Maggie's sake. She wanted her to marry well, as it is called.

The days and weeks dragged on and on. Mrs. Stuart grew no better. Maggie became dispirited and restless inwardly, although outwardly cheerful still. She only broke down once.

Her mother had dozed off, and she had stolen into the parlour to sit by the open window and enjoy the soft, warm May air laden with the sweet breath of flowers. She stole to the bedroom presently and looked in. Mrs. Stuart moved slightly and moaned. Maggie went in, bathed her forehead, waited until she had dropped off to sleep again, then returned to her window.

There was a tap at the door. Maggie opened it and admitted Colonel Selden with his hands full of flowers. Maggie took them gratefully, but she did not ask him to come in. She was a little surprised when he did so. She went to the open window again, holding the sweet, cool flowers against her hot face. They said precisely the comfort and the peace she needed.

The tears came into her eyes. Nay, there was a sob in her voice when she answered Colonel Selden's inquiry presently as to whether there were anything he could do for her. The light in the room burned very low. He leaned forward to look into her face. Yes, there were tears in her eyes. He took her hand very gently, and seated her. Then he took up a fan and fanned her as gently.

"Poor child," he said, "you are completely worn out. You need rest."

That was the drop too much that destroyed Maggie's composure. When one has been exercising great self-restraint, a pitying tone, a tender voice, unnerves one, when one could stand with entire equanimity a matter-of-fact address, or even an unkind speech. Maggie's tears flowed freely.

Colonel Selden bent over her and smoothed back the hair from her hot brow. Then he got a glass of ice-water and bathed her forehead with that. His touch soothed Maggie as by a magic spell. The tears ceased. She lay back quietly, except for an occasional voluntary sob. No word was spoken between them.

Presently Mrs. Stuart called her softly. She rose directly.

"I feel so much better," she said. "It is odd. Usually I dislike to have anyone to touch me."

It did not occur to her to keep back from him the knowledge that he had soothed her. He held her hand one moment.

"I don't ask you to take care of yourself, and reserve some of your strength for an emergency for your own sake," he said, "because that would be a waste of breath. But remember

what a bad way your mother would be in if you were to break down."

"I am very careful—I really am," she assured him, vanishing into her mother's room. And there was nothing left for him but to vanish, too.

In the dead of that night she broke down again. Poor child, she was thoroughly weak and exhausted. She wished that Colonel Selden could be with her again. There had been a charm in the very touch of his cool, strong fingers.

She lay in the arm-chair in the parlour and remembered how kind he had been, how gentle; she went over every word he had said, recalled every gesture. She suddenly recalled—herself. Heaven! Where was she drifting? She had prayed for his friendship. Was she sure now that this was what she had wanted? She fell down on her knees and prayed—this time to be saved from herself.

A few days later her father returned very unexpectedly. From that hour her mother's recovery was rapid. There was a tonic for Mrs. Stuart in her husband's very presence. From the moment of his coming Colonel Selden's fears with regard to Maggie were at rest. Her father watched her with a jealous care. He did not miss one fluctuation of colour, one expression of lassitude. Maggie was evidently the apple of her father's eye. He and she were the dearest, the most congenial friends.

In a day or two Mrs. Stuart was well enough to be left alone of an afternoon. Mr. Stuart then proposed to his daughter that they should ride together.

"Nothing like a brisk canter for toning up the nerves after such a strain upon them as you have been subjected to, darling," he told his daughter.

Colonel Selden watched the two canter off together two afternoons in succession, meeting them on his return from his office. On the third afternoon he came up just as Maggie had been mounted. At that moment a telegraph-boy came running up with a yellow envelope which he handed to Mr. Stuart, who tore it open and read the written message.

"Maggie, this is unfortunate," he said. "But I must positively see to this thing without loss of time. I shall have to give up my ride. I am sorry to disappoint you, but—"

Colonel Selden saw the girl's bright face fall. The same idea occurred simultaneously to him and to her father. He stepped forward, half diffidently, half eagerly.

"I shall be most happy to offer my services as an escort, Miss Maggie, if you will accept so unworthy a substitute."

"Thank you, colonel. That will be just the thing. It really went against the grain with me to disappoint my little girl, but it was imperative that this message should be answered. Maggie, you looked so terribly cut up a moment ago, that I fully expected you to burst forth into dramatic transports of gratitude now. Too deep for utterance, eh? Take good care of her, Colonel."

They came to a brook by the way, tumbling over brown, mossy stones. They dismounted. Colonel Selden tied their horses, and Maggie wandered up and down the brook and in and out the laurel bushes in an ecstasy of delight. She said aloud all the pretty things that came into her head; and her companion listened, almost reverently.

He made up his mind that he would not be thus with her again. He was a matter-of-fact man, but he was assailed by a presentiment that through him a cloud was to fall across the brightness of the girl's life. If fate were to be averted, it should be in this case.

As he looked at her a calm, tranquil feeling took possession of him. He felt that he cared for her so much that he would gladly sacrifice his own happiness for her, gladly bury in oblivion any mere personal feeling.

He had a fashion of telling her stories, as one tells stories by way of amusing a child. He began, when they were again mounted and were riding away once more, to sketch to her the plot

of a book he had been reading. There is a fatality about these things.

The story ran upon the unhappy marriage of a foolish, thoughtless, beautiful girl, who repented at leisure the mistakes of a careless summer. Afterwards "the one true lover that she ever had" came.

He and she were carried along by the force of their passion. One day he broke down the barriers of self-restraint, and told her how truly and devotedly he cared for her. At this point Maggie turned upon the narrator eyes of burning indignation.

"What right had he? He pretended to care for her, and yet insulted her in that way? She a married woman? It was a strange kind of love. If he had really cared he would have left her then and there; he would have left her the right to think of him as her friend, at least. Love! It was the grossest disrespect."

"You are all wrong," her companion insisted. "I admit there might have been cases where it would have been more prudent to preserve silence. But in this case it was due both to him and to her to speak."

"It was a piece of selfishness. It made it twice as hard for her. It is far harder to fight down an acknowledged affection than an unacknowledged one. To be sure he had the brief satisfaction that comes of giving way to one's feelings. Perhaps he was weak enough to appreciate that satisfaction."

Colonel Selden smiled doubtfully.

"I haven't succeeded in impressing you favourably with my hero. You have taken up a prejudice against him. But I want to go on with my story, to prove to you that he had self-control and nobility nevertheless."

Maggie laughed a little and blushed a little.

"It is astonishing how fiercely one can quarrel over these paper men and women, isn't it? Go on. My wrath is simmering down."

So Colonel Selden finished his story, and Maggie entered as warmly into it as though they had been discussing real people. Presently there was a sudden tumult behind them.

A sound of wheels, a sound of hoofs; a cloud of advancing dust, then a light waggon drawn by two horses whirled past them. As it passed part of the waggon or the trappings struck the mare Maggie was riding on the flank. The mare reared in pain and fright, plunged wildly, and Maggie was hurled headlong to the ground. The mare started down the road after the other runaway.

Colonel Selden was on his knees beside Maggie in an instant. He was half frantic with apprehension. He raised her in his arms, and called her by a dozen endearing names, he pressed passionate kisses on her white lips, he clasped her cold hands.

"Maggie!" he cried, "Maggie, darling, listen to me, I love you, it must be that I can help you."

Her eyes slowly opened. She heard what he said. Her eyes closed again, he rained kisses on them.

"Oh, Maggie!"

It seemed to her in her bewilderment that she had died, and that this was some happier state. She clung to him as he repeated:

"Oh, I love you."

Where was she, what had happened? Could she really lie in his arms like this without reproach? Then a sound of hoofs upon the road. A man on horseback rode up, to whom Colonel Selden appealed for assistance. He agreed to ride back to town and send out a carriage.

They were on the outskirts of the town, for unluckily, when the accident happened. Maggie had by this time regained her consciousness. She raised herself, supported by her companion, and looked about her dizzily. It all came back to her.

A few minutes ago she had been riding along with Colonel Selden, and there had been leagues between them. Now, all those invisible barriers were broken down. She shuddered visibly, and

endeavoured to free herself from his supporting arm; but she almost tottered to the ground.

"Don't be afraid of me," he cried, in the direct way which was one of his characteristics. "I lost my head because I thought you would never speak again. I won't break out a second time. I am not mad, I assure you. Lean on me."

And he put his arm around her with gentle force. But she drew away from him, and slipped down to the ground, where she lay against a tree, her head drooped, her eyes closed. He knelt down beside her anxiously and tried to take her hand.

"I am afraid you are going to faint a second time. Do let me do what I can for you."

"There is nothing you can do."

She withdrew her hand gently but firmly, and put it up to her face. She despised herself for her weakness, but the tears were welling in her eyes, and she did not want him to see them. She felt as though he could put but the one interpretation upon them, and would guess directly that he had caused them. But, in spite of all her efforts to the contrary, they would trickle down through her fingers. He saw them, and started to his feet with a suppressed exclamation.

"I wish I had not come," Maggie sobbed, childishly breaking down. "I ought not to have come. I—"

"We need never be together again. Forgive me this once. I was sorely tried."

"It is myself I have to try to forgive."

He stood in front of her. The tearful eyes rested on his. He dropped down on his knees beside her. He read her secret.

"Heaven help us both," he said. "Maggie, you say your prayers; pray for us both. Pray that I may be able to bear this. A little while ago you said that an unhappy love was more easily borne if unacknowledged than if acknowledged. I see it now. I wish I could bear it for us both."

The sound of approaching wheels. A carriage drew up beside them. Maggie tried to rise, staggered to her feet, then fell heavily forward into Colonel Selden's arms. Thus insensible he put her into the carriage, and they were driven away. At the hotel he was met by Mr. Stuart, who chanced to be going in. He took in the situation at a glance.

"Thrown? Send for a doctor; I will carry her upstairs."

The doctor pronounced Maggie not to be dangerously hurt; there was great mental excitement, he said. He attributed this to the fact that Maggie had been over-fatigued during the illness of her mother, and said that she was now suffering from the effects of the prolonged mental strain. She must be kept quiet, he repeated.

A week passed, during which Maggie did not reappear. Colonel Selden went about miserably. His wife betrayed an unwonted interest in Maggie. Like everyone else she liked the girl.

It even happened that Mrs. Selden was the first person Maggie saw out of her own family, after the accident. Maggie blushed guiltily, but how was Mrs. Selden to know why she blushed? Mrs. Stuart, who was about again by this time, asked her to come in, faintly perhaps; but still the invitation was extended, and Mrs. Selden came in.

"Poor child," she said, "you look dreadful. Is there anything I can do? I feel responsible for this accident, I really do, as you were with Colonel Selden at the time. Tell me just how it happened. I can hardly get a word out of him. He is like all men—thoroughly unsatisfactory."

"I have always considered that you had a most devoted husband," said Mrs. Stuart.

"Yes. Oh, well, he is attentive enough. But a woman wants more than that. She wants sympathy. He hasn't the faintest idea how I suffer, not the faintest. His nerves are iron. That is a pretty wrapper you have on, Miss Maggie, Watteau back. Anything white is so becoming to you. By the way, how do you like Madame Hunt's fit. Awfully extravagant, isn't

she, but so stylish. This dress of mine, now, don't you like it?"

"Oh, yes," Maggie and Mrs. Stuart answered in chorus, Maggie adding: "I like the way she trims. Yes, she is certainly very stylish."

"I must go now," said Mrs. Selden, rising. "I have some visits to pay. It's as much as my life is worth to persuade Colonel Selden to go with me. This afternoon, now, there are at least twenty. And he always insists that it will answer every purpose if I leave his card."

"I should think it might," Maggie replied, moved by a feeling of compassion for the reluctant colonel. She hated formal visiting herself.

Mrs. Selden sighed dissent, nodded farewell, went. In the hall she met her husband. They heard her say:

"I've just been in to see Maggie Stuart. She looks as though she had been struck with death. I was actually shocked at her appearance."

Presently another knock. It was Colonel Selden this time. He asked for Miss Maggie in a voice of such genuine anxiety and concern that Mrs. Stuart was touched.

"There she is to answer for herself," she said, pushing the door open. "Won't you come in?"

He came in diffidently. Maggie was lying with her eyes closed. She made no effort to rouse herself, beyond giving him a faint smile. He stood beside her gravely, looking heart-broken.

"Maggie always shows the effect of every little sickness," her mother said, cheerfully. "She looks badly to-day; to-morrow she will be more like herself."

Maggie gave another faint little smile.

"I feel terribly responsible for this," Colonel Selden said—"terribly. I was with her, and it seems as though I might have done something."

"That is simply morbid," said Maggie. "What on earth could you have done? The whole thing was over in a flash."

"I am going out with my wife. I must not keep her waiting. Good-bye. Won't you shake hands?"

She gave him her little satiny fingers. He held them in a long, gentle pressure. Then he raised them to his lips. Poor Maggie's face worked. If only he would stay away; if only he would realise what a trial he subjected her to in treating her in this way. When he was gone her mother said:

"He really seemed to feel dreadfully. He is extremely fond of you, Maggie."

This was too much for Maggie. She turned her face to the wall and cried silently. Her mother was none the wiser. She went into the next room and disposed herself for her afternoon nap. In five minutes Mr. Stuart came in. Maggie tried to stifle her sobs, but in her state of weakness they became uncontrollable. Her father knelt down beside her and put his arm over her.

"My darling, my darling, what is it? You frighten me."

Maggie had been accustomed all her life to bring all her woes and trials to her father. She had been accustomed to confide in him far more than in her mother. She turned to him now in an irresistible outpouring of the heart.

"Oh, papa," she said, "I feel as though my heart would break. If I only need never see him again I could stand it. But every time I see him I have to fight the whole battle over again. Oh, it is so hard!"

Mr. Stuart allowed her to sob herself quiet. He held her to him, and stroked her hair and kissed her hand now and then, as if in silent assurance of sympathy. After a while he said:

"Now, my darling, tell me what it is, if it will be any comfort to you. Colonel Selden has just gone away from you, I know. Has he anything to do with it?"

"Oh, papa, yes. Oh, papa, don't hate me, don't put me away from you if I tell you that we care for each other. Isn't it dreadful. But we do?"

"Has he spoken to you?" with wrath in his voice.

"He did not know what he was doing. He scarcely knew that I heard him. At first he thought I was unconscious. It was the day I fainted when I was thrown. And I—I can't remember now what I did say; but I think I told him—I think he gathered that I cared for him. I have cared for him a long time. I have fought against it. I hoped I had conquered it, until that day we rode together. Then the whole thing burst out into flame. And now I am afraid of myself. Oh, papa, take me away from here. I ought never to see him again."

Her father soothed her and pitied her. Her sobs and tears distressed him, but otherwise he laid little stress upon the feelings she expressed. It seemed to him that Maggie exaggerated it; but as she talked he realised more plainly the reality of her trouble. His heart sank within him. That such an experience should have overtaken his dear, bright, bonnie Maggie!

At dusk there was a knock at the door. Mr. Stuart answered it, and found Colonel Selden standing outside with a basket of flowers in his hand. He would have come in, but Mr. Stuart stopped him.

"Maggie is very weak and nervous. I think she had better not be agitated by seeing you," he explained.

Maggie raised herself up on her elbow and listened. She recognised Colonel Selden's voice.

"Papa," she said, "tell him now. I wish you would, papa! Come here one moment." Then when her father had come to her: "Tell him how I feel. Tell him we ought never to meet again."

Mr. Stuart returned somewhat unwillingly to the charge. But Colonel Selden had heard every word Maggie had said. He stood before Mr. Stuart as white as a ghost and with that rigid look on his face that accompanies mental suffering.

"I heard what Maggie said. It shall be as she wishes."

He slowly moved away down the hill. Mr. Stuart accompanied him.

"I hope you understand, Mr. Stuart, that my avowal to your daughter was positively wrong from me. I fancied, besides, that she was unconscious. It is a terrible affair. I wish I could bear all the suffering. In the nature of things, I suffer with a greater intensity—at my age. Besides I reproach myself; I blame myself to a great extent for my want of self-control. My wife has been urging me to apply for leave, and take her abroad. The ocean shall roll between us."

"I fancy that will be an excellent arrangement," Mr. Stuart said. "As soon as Maggie is able to travel we will go to the seashore." But the doctor tells me she ought not to be moved under a month. Poor little thing. She is physically so weak that that renders her unfit to cope with any mental strain like this. I have great confidence in the magic power of time. It works wonders."

"Charlie."

Mrs. Selden's voice was heard. Mr. Stuart stopped, turned, sighed.

"I would willingly die for her," Colonel Selden said, grasping his companion's hand. "You find it difficult to credit this, when I have caused her so much unhappiness—but I beg you to judge me as leniently as possible. She will pity me without my asking it of her. Will you say good-bye to her from me?"

The next day Mrs. Stuart announced the coming departure of the Seldens.

After the departure of the Seldens, Maggie registered a simple but a solemn resolution never again to allude to her father to the subject of her unhappy attachment. Pride and dignity and principle all combined to enforce reticence and self-restraint. And when a woman does her very best, Heaven never fails to come to the rescue and to help her to carry out her purpose.

She led an outwardly commonplace life. Her mother was bent upon her carrying out her own original programme for her, and could never

be brought to understand that Maggie would rather be quiet than gay.

Gradually Mrs. Stuart worked her way up to the social stratum where she desired to belong. Mr. Stuart made money and reputation. Maggie's own individual claims upon admiration were recognised. Mrs. Stuart was more than satisfied with what she accomplished. Her only cause of complaint was with Maggie herself. Maggie's indifference and lukewarmness were undeniable.

"But, mother dear, I am tired of it all," she would say. "Remember this is my fourth winter out. I have lost my illusions. I often think it is time for me to withdraw. Don't you think there ought to be a law against the older girls crowding up the drawing-rooms? They should stay at home and give the younger generation a chance."

I linger about the end of my story, which has been a sad one so far. I would have had no right to write it, however, had it had a sad ending. Heaven knows there is misery enough on the page of life without reflecting it on the printed page. One day there came a newspaper to Maggie. One paragraph in it was marked. It recorded the death in Rome, of Roman fever, of Mrs. Selden.

Maggie read the paragraph with a shudder. Dead! Her first wish was that it might have been herself. Her second thought was one of intense misgiving. Unconsciously she had done this dead woman a great wrong. Poor child, she prayed to be forgiven. Do you or I doubt that absolution followed?

Colonel Selden read her aright. It was months before he even wrote to her. He trusted her. He hoped she trusted him. At last he came.

People shrugged their shoulders a little at Maggie's marriage. So matter-of-fact. A second marriage was never the least bit romantic; especially if a man had been as devoted as Colonel Selden had been to his first wife. Maggie neither saw the shrug nor heard the comment; but she was very romantically happy in spite of them.

M. L.

UNCARED FOR.

He was one who no one cared for — a waif upon the sea of life;
Want from childhood was his portion, day by day with sorrow rife,
Hope's cast on life's stormy ocean, built upon its shifting sand,
Grasping ever at the shadow of a promised helping hand.

Not a spark of self-reliance brighten'd his beclouded life,
No fair vision of some loved one ever came to soothe the strife
Raging in his bosom, ceaseless war against his fellow man,
Heedless of the simple warning that his life was but a span.

So he lived and sank forgotten to his last, oft-wished repose.
Did the angels ope the portal to receive him no one knows;
He had been in life's stern battle ever vanquished in the fight,
May his errors be forgotten in a dawn of endless light. O. P.

AFTER MARRIAGE.

The happiest marriages are those in which a high type of friendship follows love. Friendship of a sublimated sort is what love becomes after a year or so of marriage, and he who is friendly to the very depths of his soul enters into this state happily, and is ready for all the delights that follow. But a man who is capable

of nothing but that fleeting affection which ever pursues a new object, and cares for no woman when she is won, hates the domestic ties and becomes detestable in consequence. It is the man who would die for his friend, and for whom his friend would die, who makes a miraculously happy wife of the woman to whom he scarcely knew how to make love when he courted her.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

COCOANUT PUDDING.—Three slices of bread soaked in one pint of milk. Take six eggs—separate yolks from white. Beat the yolks well into the bread, using one egg at a time, adding one ounce of butter. Take half a pound of desiccated cocoanut and mix with the bread, adding another pint of milk, sweetening to taste. Beat the whites of the eggs to a froth, and mix with the compound just before baking. Put in a moderately-hot oven, and bake for one hour. It is rather rich, and a little goes a great way.

CURE FOR A COUGH.—Ground flax-seed and finest pearl barley, of each a heaping tablespoonful; of pulverised licorice-root, one heaping teaspoonful; of best loaf-sugar, one-quarter of a pound; place all in an earthen vessel; pour on one quart of boiling water; cover tightly until cool, and drink of it frequently. It should be made fresh every twelve hours.

TO RENOVATE BLACK GOODS.—Take one-fifth of a pound of extract of logwood and one ounce of saleratus; put in a boiler with ten gallons of water, cold or hot; stand over the fire, and when boiling hot put in the goods, either wet or dry; let stand twenty minutes, moving about occasionally; rinse in cold water until the goods drip clear, and iron immediately. This will be found a most excellent receipt for restoring black goods of any kind that have become rusty or brown—cloth, cachmere, a waterproof, worsted grenadine, or any material that will not cockle in wetting. Press them on the wrong side.

MISCELLANEOUS.

The idea of giving up Epsom as a race-course is at length abandoned.

By the new act on stamp duties on probate and letters of administration which has now come into force relief from legacy duty is granted when the whole personal estate is under one hundred pounds.

It is understood at Portsmouth that the Prince of Wales contemplates paying a visit to Australia in the course of the autumn, and that the troopship "Serapis," in which he went to India, will be employed for the service.

At Japanese dinner-tables one frequently sees fish alive in a bowl, and on inquiry, it is discovered that the slices served at the repast have been cut from the fish in the bowl, the skin being neatly sewn after the cutting. This is done to show that the fish is fresh.

The volunteer force trained its "majority" on the 12th inst. On May 12, 1359, General Peel, then Secretary of State for War, issued the new historical "Circular Letter," which called the organisation into existence, and during the twenty-one years through which the force has since passed, with many vicissitudes, it has kept steadily increasing its efficiency and numbers, having now an enrolled strength of upwards of 206,000 and nearly 198,000 efficient.

One of the chief clerks of a Joint Stock Bank waited on an Irish gentleman recently, and informed him that he had overdrawn his account to the tune of a hundred pounds. "Well, I know that," replied the veteran, "so what's the necessity of boring me about it? I don't go to you when I have that amount in your institution and shout, 'Mr. Manager, you hold a hundred pounds of mine!' Such statements are superfluous either way. Good-morning."

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NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

FARM LABOURER.—1. To sue for a divorce in forma pauperis, you must first obtain a lawyer's certificate that you have good and reasonable grounds for an action. The cost would then be about five guineas. 2. We do not publish the names or recommend lawyers; but as you particularly desire it we have no objection to give you one or two names by post. Forward stamped envelope.

G. E. A. B. is anxious to know who was the author of "Redeemed by Love," and where it is to be obtained. Can any of our readers oblige him?

SYLVESTRE.—She can be married in the name by which she has been known to the world.

DOUBTFUL TILLY.—The bet of a pair of gloves having been made, it is a matter of honour for the loser to provide the gloves, therefore you have done quite right.

ANXIOUS.—An engagement ring is generally worn by a gentleman on the little finger of the right hand; a lady wears hers on the third finger of the right hand.

RUTH.—On the principle that common sense is desirable in a husband, and that a moderate degree of self-control is conducive to domestic bliss, we deem your lover an unsuitable companion for life. You are young enough to wait a while, and as for him, we should think it proper to relegate him to the nursery until he has learnt how to behave.

H. W. C.—The young lady probably thinks right, and the best thing for you to do would be to try and overcome your jealous disposition, and wait a few years as patiently as you can.

P. W. B.—The legal control of a father over his son ends when the latter comes of age, which is when he has attained his twenty-first year. After that he has no power to interfere with the actions of his children, they being henceforth responsible to society for their doings.

LEONARD.—According to your statement of the case, it would hardly be just to either of the ladies to marry her. A man who pays attention to two ladies at the same time is not apt to be worthy of either of them. You should have a frank talk with your parents, and come to a clear understanding with them on the subject. Afterwards you can go ahead with your wooing of one lady with a clear conscience.

N. H.—The best authorities give the whole number of Popes, including Pius IX., at two hundred and sixty-two. The present Pope is therefore the two hundred and sixty-third pontiff.

TUEP.—We think the Duke of Westminster will win the Derby with *MURCARTER* on the 26th inst.

L. P.—It is not necessary to say anything. A bow and a smile are all that are necessary.

MARY.—Pandemonium is the supposed great hall of demons or evil spirits. Psyche was a beautiful maiden with whom Cupid fell in love.

INQUIRER.—In some countries it is lawful. In others it is not.

ELL.—Very good.

CLARE B.—You have been very foolish to fall in love before you knew the young man's feelings towards you. Strive to withdraw your affections from him. Your talk about life without him being more dreary than the grave is all nonsense.

JOSEPH.—Fortune is not always a matter of chance; many people have built their own fortunes. There are many accidents in life which are favourable to us if we know how to profit by them. But the great art lies in these rules: Spend nothing that you can avoid spending; do without many things; lose no time; never buy a bargain unless you want it; never buy a thing because it is cheap unless it is good; until you begin to rise bear every privation that may lift you up; above all, never run into debt.

M. W. H. T.—The "middle ages" may be called that period in the history of Europe which begins with the final destruction of the Roman Empire, and is considered by some to end with the taking of Constantinople; by others with the Reformation, the discovery of America, the invention of printing, &c. According to Hallam, who wrote a history of this period, it extends from the invasion of France by Clovis, A.D. 486, to that of Naples by Charles VIII. in 1495.

G. T. E. and WILLIAM, two friends, would like to correspond with two young ladies. G. T. E. is twenty-four, fond of home and children. William is twenty-one, fair, Respondents must be domesticated.

NELLIE, BERTHA, and LESLIE, three friends, would like to correspond with three young men. Nellie is seventeen, medium height, fair, blue eyes. Bertha is seventeen, dark hair, blue eyes, medium height. Leslie is seventeen, tall, light hair, blue eyes, fond of home and music. Respondents must be tall, good-looking, and in good positions.

LAURA and ALICE, two friends, would like to correspond with two gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Laura is twenty-two, dark, fond of dancing. Alice is twenty, fair, good-tempered, and fond of music and dancing, brown hair, hazel eyes.

BLANCHÉ, twenty-three, medium height, hazel eyes, fond of home, would like to correspond with a gentleman about twenty-one, of a loving disposition, dark, tall, fond of music, good-looking.

H. R. would like to correspond with a young lady about twenty, tall, dark, domesticated.

SIRIE, twenty-one, of a loving disposition, would like to correspond with a lady with a view to matrimony. She must be fair, good-looking, fond of children, and able to fond of home, good-looking.

JENNIE and CARRIE, two friends, would like to correspond with two gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Jennie is twenty-three, domesticated, medium height, fond of music, dark. Carrie is twenty, good-looking, tall, fair, thoroughly domesticated. Respondents must be fond of home, good-looking.

THE WEDDING OF THE KIRK.

Now, open the window, Andy,
Yes, open the window wide,
And let me see the old kirk
And the bonnie, bonnie bride.
'Tis a goodly couple's wedding,
And they both were kind to me
When you were a sailor, Andy,
A sailor upon the sea.

When I thought you dead, my Andy,
And grief had made me wild,
They brought the sweetest offerings
To me and your little child;
And when the good ship "Banney"
Came in quite unawares
And brought you safe, my Andy,
No happier hearts than theirs.

Three years ago, dear Andy,
You brought from o'er the sea
As pretty a bride, my laddie,
As you would wish to see;
Too sweet and good and winsome
To tarry long on earth,
Though she left to us, my Andy,
The bairnie from its birth.

She came as comes my Andy,
A dream too bright to last,
To bless and cheer and comfort
When skies were overcast.
And instead of poor old mother,
Whose sun seemed almost down,
She sleeps in the kirkyard, Andy,
Just out of the little town.

Now, open the window, Andy,
Yes, open the window wide,
For no prettier sight, my laddie,
To me than a bonnie bride.
And my prayers go up that Heaven
May hallow the bridal day,
While the wedding bells are ringing
And the pipes so merrily play. M. A. K.

ALICE and DAISY, two friends, would like to correspond with two gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Alice is eighteen, dark hair, blue eyes. Daisy is eighteen, fair, blue eyes, pretty. Respondents must be tall, dark, and good-looking.

AWAY ALOFT, a seaman in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with a young lady who is fond of home and music. He is dark, medium height, hazel eyes, good-looking.

LOUIS and FLOW, two friends, would like to correspond with two dark, tall gentlemen. Louise is eighteen, good-looking, hazel eyes. Flow is seventeen, medium height, good-tempered.

POLLY and ELLEN, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men. Polly is eighteen, fair, tall, good-looking. Ellen is seventeen, medium height, fond of music. Respondents must be tall, dark, fond of music and dancing.

CREOLE, twenty-one, tall, dark, good-looking, would like to correspond with a young lady about seventeen. Money no object.

PORT ROYAL TOM and HIS DECK, two seamen in the Royal Navy, wish to correspond with two young ladies. Port Royal Tom is thirty, brown hair, blue eyes, medium height. His Deck is twenty-one, black eyes, of a loving disposition.

ANNE and MARY, two friends, wish to correspond with two gentlemen. Anne is twenty-two, dark hair, blue eyes, fond of home and children. Mary is twenty-three, fair, medium height, of a loving disposition, thoroughly domesticated, and fond of home. Respondents must be about twenty-four, loving.

FLYING JACK AVERY, a seaman in the Royal Navy, fair, of a loving disposition, would like to correspond with a young lady about eighteen.

MAUDE, EDITH, and ETHEL, would like to correspond with three young men. Maude is twenty, thoroughly domesticated, dark, fond of home. Edith is twenty-three, tall, dark hair, of a loving disposition. Ethel is eighteen, fair, blue eyes, fond of children.

ANNIE, twenty-five, of a loving disposition, would like to correspond with a petty officer in the Royal Navy.

B. J. B. eighteen, medium height, good-looking, would like to correspond with a young lady about the same age.

DOLLIE and MINNIE, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men. Dollie is twenty-one, tall, fair, blue eyes, good-looking. Minnie is twenty-two, medium height, brown hair, dark eyes.

MORRIS, twenty-one, fair, medium height, Auburn hair, a seaman in the Royal Navy, good-looking, would like to correspond with a young lady with a view to matrimony about eighteen.

R. M., nineteen, fair, would like to correspond with a young lady about the same age, light hair, fair, medium height, good-looking.

BEATRICE and BESSY, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men with a view to matrimony. Beatrice is dark, medium height, dark eyes, of a loving disposition, fond of home and music. Bessy is seventeen, fair, hazel eyes, tall, loving, and fond of home and children.

ETHEL and DORA, two friends, wish to correspond with two gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Ethel is twenty-one, brown hair, blue eyes, fair, good-looking, fond of home, of a loving disposition. Dora is twenty-three, black hair, blue eyes, tall, dark, fond of home and music, handsome.

EDITH and AMELIA, two friends, would like to correspond with two gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Edith is nineteen, tall, dark hair and eyes, of a loving disposition, fond of music. Amelia is nineteen, fond of home, handsome, brown hair, blue eyes.

JESSIE, JANET, and NELLIE, three friends, would like to correspond with three gentlemen from twenty-five to thirty. Jessie is twenty, tall, fair, fond of music. Janet is twenty-four, dark, fond of home and children. Nellie is twenty-three, medium height, fair, good-tempered, fond of home and children.

QUEENIE, VIOLET, and MAUDE, three friends, would like to correspond with three young men. Queenie is seventeen, tall, golden hair, brown eyes. Violet is seventeen, medium height, dark hair and eyes, good-looking. Maude is seventeen, medium height, light hair, blue eyes. Respondents must be about twenty, tall, good-looking, and dark.

COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED:

ALLISON is responded to by—Captain Fore Top, twenty-four, dark hair, hazel eyes.

JENNY by—Pet of his Mess, twenty-three, brown hair, hazel eyes, fair.

DORA by—Cecil.

LILY by—Tom.

M. M. by—Jenny, tall, fair, brown hair and eyes, good-looking, fond of home and children, and of a loving disposition.

W. D. by—N. W.

HENRY by—Gipsy, nineteen, tall, dark hair, brown eyes.

C. R. B. by—Nellie G., seventeen, tall, fond of home.

DIAMOND by—Testotaller, tall, dark, and fond of children.

PEARL by—Neptune, tall, dark, loving.

RUBY by—Boom Tricer, medium height, dark, and of a loving disposition.

EMILY by—Thomas S.

J. P. by—M. T., twenty-six, medium height, loving, dark brown hair, dark blue eyes, fond of children.

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London: Published for the Proprietors at 334, Strand, by A. SMITH & Co.